The Retrograde

Monday, April 7, 2025

UTD's official, independently-run student newspaper.

retrogradenews.com

@retrograde_news

WHAT'S INSIDE?

Student Affairs deletes strike-focused and political Mercury articles 5

Meet the UTD club with its head in the stars 7

# 'ARE YOU AN ILLEGAL IMMIGRANT?'

Right-wing instigators disrupt Trans Day of Visibility demonstration with bigotry, threats of violence toward students and admin

**MUAAZ ABED**
Staff Writer

**GREGORIO OLIVARES GUTIERREZ**
Editor-in-Chief

Off-campus instigators disrupted the March 31 Trans Day of Visibility demonstration hosted by UTD's chapter of Young Democratic Socialists of America by making racist, demeaning and violent remarks toward demonstrators and UTD administrators. Students organizing the demonstration also reported receiving verbal harassment and threats of violence from additional disruptors affiliated with UTD's Turning Point USA chapter.

The demonstration, which began at 2 p.m. at the TI Plaza, was first announced March 28 on YDSA's public Instagram account in response to what the organization called a "culture of hate" TPUSA had created since the Plinth attack the week prior, where a trans student hit a TPUSA officer with a bike lock and was arrested. Along with roughly 30 YDSA officers and demonstrators, the event was attended by a gathering of four UTDPD officers, including Chief Brent Tourangeau, and nine campus administrators, including Rafael Martín, vice president and chief of staff, and Kim Winkler, associate dean for student engagement initiatives. Administrators observed the protest from behind a metal barricade near Founders. Around half an hour after the demonstration started, TPUSA members and individuals unaffiliated with UTD began a counter-demonstration.

Hudson Kazuto Green, a computer science senior and TPUSA member who helped TPUSA table at the Plinth before the demonstration started, shared a video on Instagram around 4 p.m. of a conversation between himself and Martín. Martín informed Green that counter protesters must stay behind a barrier if they plan on disrupting the demonstration. Green asked what determines disruption, and Martín said he will determine what is disruptive.

"UTD admin saying I don't have free speech on campus," Green wrote in the Instagram post. "I am on a public sidewalk on campus. He [Martín] initially came up to me and told me I must be completely silent during their protest, but when I confronted him with a camera, the goalposts moved to whatever he personally considers disruptive."

Shortly after the demonstration began, an unidentified man appearing in his late fifties moved away from the crowd and took a phone call, where he informed someone that student demonstrators were gathered in the TI Plaza and that the person he was calling should make their way over. By 2:15 p.m. a mixed group of TPUSA officers, including criminology senior and president Paige Neumann, and middle-aged men, including far-right internet personality Alex Stein, arrived and began recording the protest on their phones and cameras.

At 2:22 p.m. Stein, his recording team and TPUSA officers entered the demonstration area and began disrupting it. The camera operators came extremely close to student demonstrators and pushed cameras into their faces, which YDSA officers in vests tried to block using keffiyehs to cover the lenses. Literature freshman and YDSA member Lourdes Ocampo said that at one point they used their keffiyeh to block a man's camera, and when the wind blew the keffiyeh into touching the man's arm, he patted his waist, which according to Ocampo hid the outline of a concealed firearm. Ocampo said that a few minutes later, another cameraman said he would punch them if their keffiyeh touched him. ATEC junior and YDSA member Naethra Joshi said she was afraid of the counter protesters potentially turning violent.

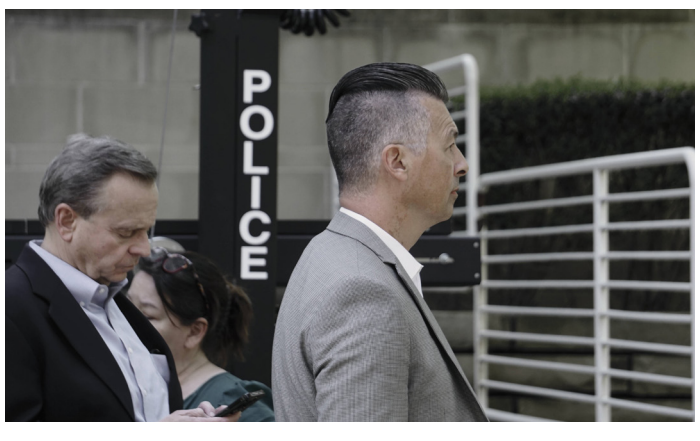
"I was there leading the chants and stuff and I was trying to be as loud as possible to drown out what they're saying, but I was mildly fearful that they would start escalating," Joshi said. "Because I mean, they were there in large groups of like five to ten, just random Nazis really there around us, and then Alex Stein being there too."

At 2:28 p.m., Stein took a knee in the center of the demonstration, and various onlookers, including Ocampo and Joshi, reported that he said, "I'm with you and support reassignment surgery, we want genital mutilation." Stein briefly departed from the TI Plaza afterward, before he returned wearing a niqab and said, "I'm also free Palestine, I don't like Jewish people either." Members of UTD Hillel, including psychology sophomore and president Jade Steinberg, viewed the protest from afar. Steinberg said they had come to the protest to show support for trans students but ended up sitting on the sidelines after being met with "hostility" from the demonstrators. Steinberg said they were further disheartened by Stein's antisemitic rhetoric, and that the event was a reminder that hatred was not limited to certain ideologies.

At 2:29 p.m., Martín left the barricade area and approached the mixed crowd of YDSA demonstrators and TPUSA counter protesters. Martín repeatedly asked Stein and TPUSA to stand at a distance

SEE ILLEGAL, PAGE 3

PHOTOS BY SURJADITYA SARKAR & LYNN CHEN | RETROGRADE STAFF



**Topmost photo: Alex Stein (left) confronts Vice President Rafael Martín. Middle left: Stein dons a black cloth with the appearance of a niqab. Middle right: A UTD student gives a speech at the demonstration. Bottom left: UTD administrators watch the demonstration from afar. Bottom middle: Stein takes a knee while Martín and demonstrators watch. Bottom right: Demonstrators hold a sign reading "existance is resistance."**

## UTD strikes out at President's Cup — again

For the second year in a row, UTD hosted, and lost, the prestigious championship

**GREGORIO OLIVARES GUTIERREZ**
Editor-in-Chief

SURJADITYA SARKAR | RETROGRADE STAFF

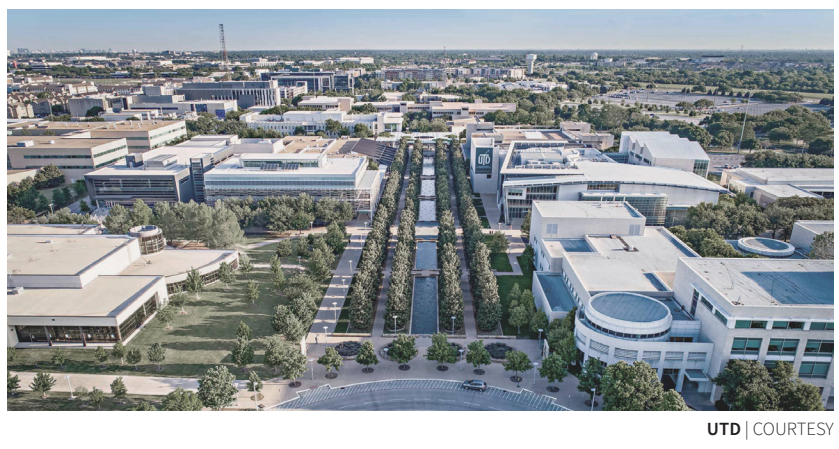
The UTD Chess Team hosted the President's Cup for the second year in a row April 5-6 in the McDermott Library, once again finishing last.

Chess teams from four universities participated in the event, which functions as the national college chess championship under the United States Chess Federation. At seven points each, Webster University and UT Rio Grande Valley were declared the co-champions of the tournament, and Webster took home the trophy and first place after a tiebreaker based on the number of matches won. St. Louis University came in third place with six points, and UTD took home fourth place with four points and zero round wins.

The cup brought extremely talented chess players from around the U.S. to UTD, with a total of 14 chess grandmasters, seven international masters and one national master present. UTD's team had an average FIDE rating of 2468, placing it second overall among its competitors. UTRGV had the highest average rating at 2479, Webster had the third highest at 2462 and St. Louis had the lowest average rating at 2420.

UTD invited Collegiate Chess League commissioner Joe Lee and grandmaster Brian Escalante to provide a live analysis of the tournament, hosted at the SSA Gaming Wall. By round three of the tournament, Lee began to speculate the tournament would end with co-champions. The full ten-hour analysis can be found on the league's Twitch channel, which as of publication has been viewed by over 25,000

SEE CHESS, PAGE 3



UTD | COURTESY

## What the UT System's drag ban means for UTD

**TYLER CRIVELLA**
Staff Writer

On March 18, the UT System Board of Regents announced that drag shows would no longer be allowed on University of Texas campuses, including UTD.

The board did not define what a drag show is; however, it said that the policy intends to fall in line with President Donald Trump's Executive Order 14168, which prohibits public funds from being used to "promote gender ideology." On March 28, the UNT System Board of Regents adopted a similar policy.

The ban comes after the Texas A&M System Board of Regents banned drag shows on its campuses Feb. 28, the first drag-specific prohibition in Texas higher education. After A&M System's ban, Tarrant County Judge Tim O'Hare

SEE DRAG, PAGE 4

THE RETROGRADE
retrogradenews.com
theretrogradenews@gmail.com

**Editor-in-Chief**
Gregorio Olivares Gutierrez

**Managing Editor**
Maria Shaikh

**Graphics Editor**
Anika Sultana

**Photo Editor**
Katya Zakar

**Copy Editor**
Fiyin Olajide

**News Editor**
Aimee Morgan

**Life & Arts Editor**
Nandini Singh

**Opinion Editor**
Open for Hire

**Web Editor**
Rainier Pederson

**Distribution Manager**
Lulu Cheng

**Social Media Manager**
Carlotta Fernandez

**Contributors**
Muaaz Abed
Grace Cowger
Tyler Crivella
Lynn Chen
Yiyi Ding
Ashna Karia
Alexander Lawless
Deborah Luo
Mar Ologban
Samhitha Palla
Alana Platt
Varun Saravanan
Surjaditya Sarkar

**Pricing Information:**
The first paper is free, the second costs $1.00.

**Corrections/ Clarifications**
Bring factual errors or inaccuracies to the attention of the Editor-in-Chief by emailing theretrogradenews@gmail.com and a correction will be published in the following issue.

**Non-Student Board of Directors**
Humberto González-Núñez
Michael Koretzky
Steven Monacelli

*The Retrograde* is published on Mondays, at monthly intervals during the long term of The University of Texas at Dallas except holidays and exam periods. Frequency is subject to change at the discretion of *The Retrograde's* management board.

Advertising is accepted by *The Retrograde* on the basis that there is no discrimination by the advertiser in the offering of goods or services to any person on any basis as prohibited by applicable law. The publication of advertising in *The Retrograde* does not constitute an endorsement of products or services by the newspaper, or *The Retrograde* nonprofit board of directors.

Opinions expressed in *The Retrograde* are those of the editor, the editorial board or the writer of the article. They are not necessarily the view of *The Retrograde* newspaper nonprofit corporation or its nonprofit board of directors.

*The Retrograde's* editors retain the right to refuse or edit any submission based on libel, malice, spelling, grammar and style.

Since September 2024, *The Retrograde* has served as the official student newspaper of The University of Texas at Dallas per Student Government Resolution 2024-05 "In support of recognizing The Retrograde as the official campus newspaper."

*The Retrograde* is available free of charge, limited to one copy per reader. Additional copies of *The Retrograde* may be purchased for $1.00 payable to The Retrograde Newspaper in advance. *The Retrograde* may be distributed only by authorized independent contractors and authorized volunteer distributors. No person may, without prior written permission of *The Retrograde,* take more than one copy of each *The Retrograde* issue.

Copyright©2025, The Retrograde Newspaper. The entire contents of *The Retrograde,* whether in print or online, may not be reproduced or republished in part or in whole without express written permission.

*The Retrograde* is a proud member of both the Associated Collegiate Press and the Texas Intercollegiate Press Association.

# Police Blotter

**March 14**
- An individual vandalized PS1 with graffiti.

**March 15**
- An individual was found in possession of drug paraphernalia.
- An individual stole property valued under $100 in UV building 31.

**March 16**
- An individual burgled vehicles in Lot U.

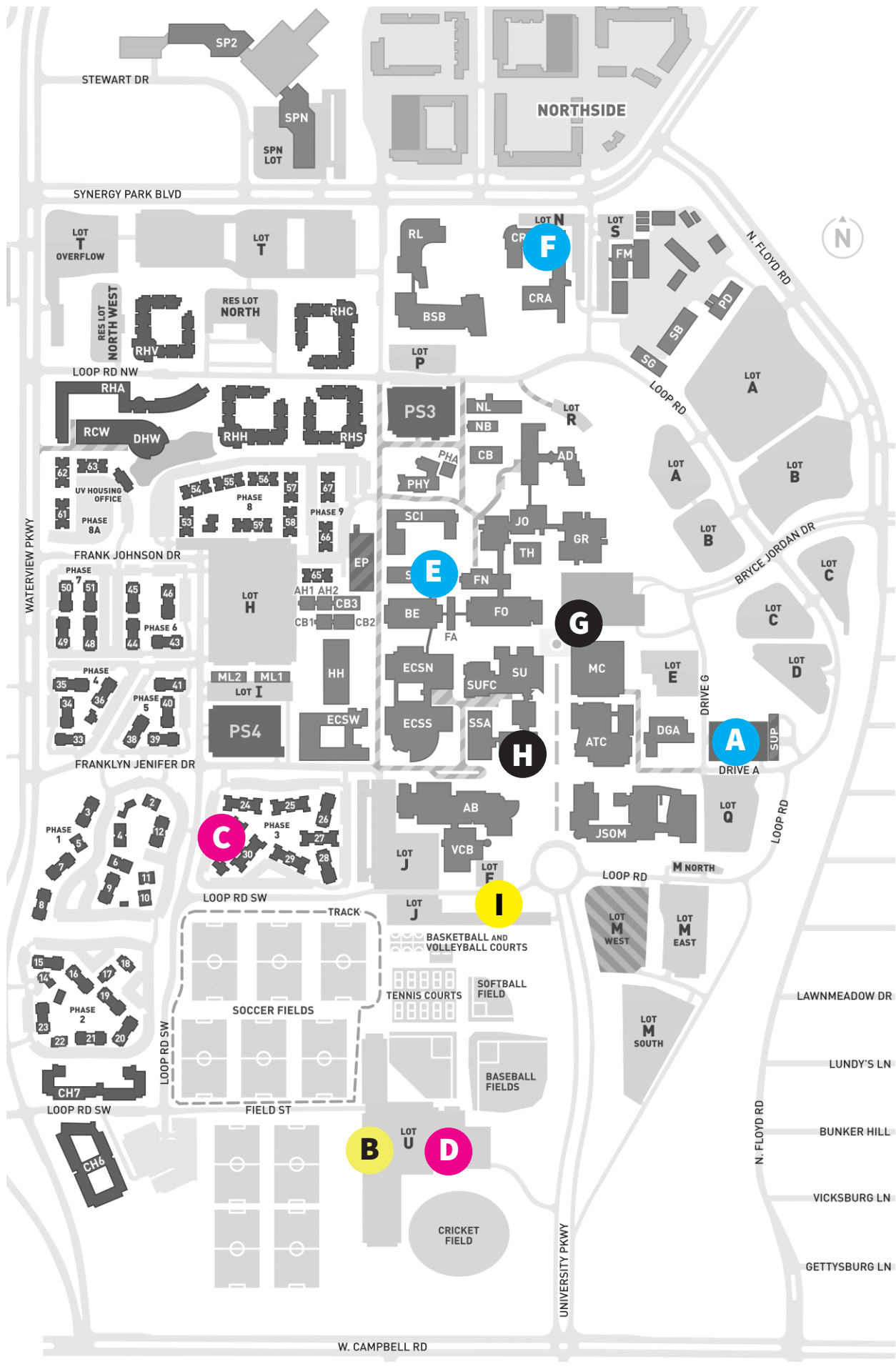
**March 21**
- An individual vandalized SLC with graffiti.

**March 24**
- An individual vandalized the Callier Center with graffiti.

**March 25**
- An individual committed aggravated assault in the Plinth.
- An individual assaulted a peace officer in the SSB.

**March 31**
- An individual was publicly intoxicated at a public bus stop.

**LEGEND**
- VANDALISM
- THEFT
- DRUGS & ALCOHOL
- OTHER




# From The Retrograde Archives: May 1, 2024

## Law enforcement raids pro-Palestine encampment, arrests students and faculty

### Nine students and three faculty members were among those detained as police tore down encampment

**By: Maria Shaikh, Gregorio Olivares Gutierrez, André Averion**

Less than 12 hours after pro-Palestine student activists formed the "Gaza Liberation Plaza" encampment in UTD's Chess Plaza, local police and state troopers stormed the event, dismantling the tents and barricades constructed throughout the day and arresting student and faculty protesters.

At 4:30 a.m., a coalition of student groups including Students for Justice in Palestine, Young Democratic Socialists of America and Rainbow Guard created the UTD Solidarity with Gaza Encampment overnight, inviting students to join them throughout the day. Three UTD professors, nine students, eight community members and one alum were arrested at 4 p.m. UTD is now the second Texas university to have the Texas Department of Public Safety intervene, following the arrests at UT Austin, which led to the detainment of over 100 people.

Reports of state troopers heading to the encampment began at approximately 2:40 p.m. By 4 p.m., law enforcement officials from UTDPD, Texas DPS, Texas Marshals, Richardson PD and Collin County Sheriff's Office began marching toward the encampment clad in riot gear. Officers used wire handcuffs to bind those arrested. Officers carried riot batons, assault rifles, riot shotguns, gas masks, wire handcuffs, sawblades, bolt cutters, night vision devices and grenade launchers.

By 4 p.m., at least 60 officers from the various composite forces arrived at the encampment with roughly 30 police vehicles and armored vans parked outside SSB and SSA, when roughly 200 students were present at the encampment. Law enforcement told protesters to leave the encampment or face arrest. Eleven protesters linked arms and sat in the center of the encampment, where they were arrested. Law enforcement then began tearing down the encampment and blockading the entrances to Chess Plaza. Water, food and other supplies were confiscated and relocated using facility vehicles. Around 5 p.m, snipers were spotted on top of SSA.

A Collin County Sherrif's Office Deputy injured Fox 4 reporter Blake Hanson when the deputy struck him with bolt cutters as Hanson attempted to film Alibhai's arrest. The same deputy forcefully shoved a student protester off a wall in Chess Plaza. Officers used force to arrest student demonstrators who locked arms in the encampment, throwing some to the ground before binding them with wire handcuffs and dragging the protesters into police vans. Assistant Professor of Art History Ali Alibhai said that during his arrest, officers kicked him and attempted to flip him over onto the ground.

By 5:40 p.m., a vehicle-mounted tear gas launcher accompanied by 16 officers with grenade launchers moved toward the destroyed encampment and ongoing protest. By 5:42 p.m., demonstrators began marching away from the officers and toward the Plinth, where nearly 200 protesters continued demonstrating throughout the evening. By 5:47 p.m., law enforcement vacated Chess Plaza after removing the last piece of the encampment. Protesters demonstrated at the Plinth until roughly 6:45 p.m. before moving to demonstrate at the Collin County Jail at 7 p.m.

From 4 to 5 p.m., approximately seven counter-protesters holding Israeli flags gathered on the outskirts of the demonstration. The counter-protesters declined to comment.

Arrested faculty include Alibhai, Associate History Professor Ben Wright and Assistant History Professor Rosemary Admiral. Arrested students include SJP President Mousa Najjar and SJP Secretary Nour Saad alongside seven other students. *The Mercury* has contacted the Bass School for comment regarding the faculty arrests; as of publication Dean Nils Roemer has not responded. The arrested protesters were taken to Collin County Jail.

At 7 p.m. UTD staff played a pre-recorded announcement in the Student Union announcing it would be closed early and requesting that students leave the premises by 8 p.m. On Wednesdays, the SU usually closes at midnight. At the time of publication, Student Union Director Dan Goodwin has not provided a statement. On May 2, the Administration Building was closed to students and the public.

*The Retrogade Archives include previous Retrograde publications and works created by founding members of The Retrograde prior to UTD's dismantling of The Mercury.*

# COMET WIND SOARS TO FINALS IN COLLEGE WIND COMPETITION

## With undergrad teams battling to create the best turbine designs and wind farm prototypes, the breeze is in Comet Wind's sails

**MARIA SHAIKH**
Managing Editor

Comet Wind, the competitive arm of UTD's Wind Energy Club recently advanced to the final round in the U.S. Department of Energy's 2025 Collegiate Wind Competition as one of 12 finalist teams nationwide.

The annual 10-month long competition asks college teams to design a theoretical wind farm, focusing on everything from the engineering to the community outreach to the financial analysis involved through three main sub-competitions: turbine design, connection creation and project development. This year's event required teams to design a floating offshore wind turbine — something Alyssa Tran, mechanical engineering senior and one of the team leads, said isn't commonly seen in U.S. turbine designs, requiring them to innovate.

"The wind turbine has to be able to float on the water as it generates electricity, which is a real design that is implemented mostly in Europe [because] they have less land mass, so that has been a big challenge," Tran said. "Our design team has been trying to tackle making a foundation that floats and then making blades, pitching mechanisms, generators."

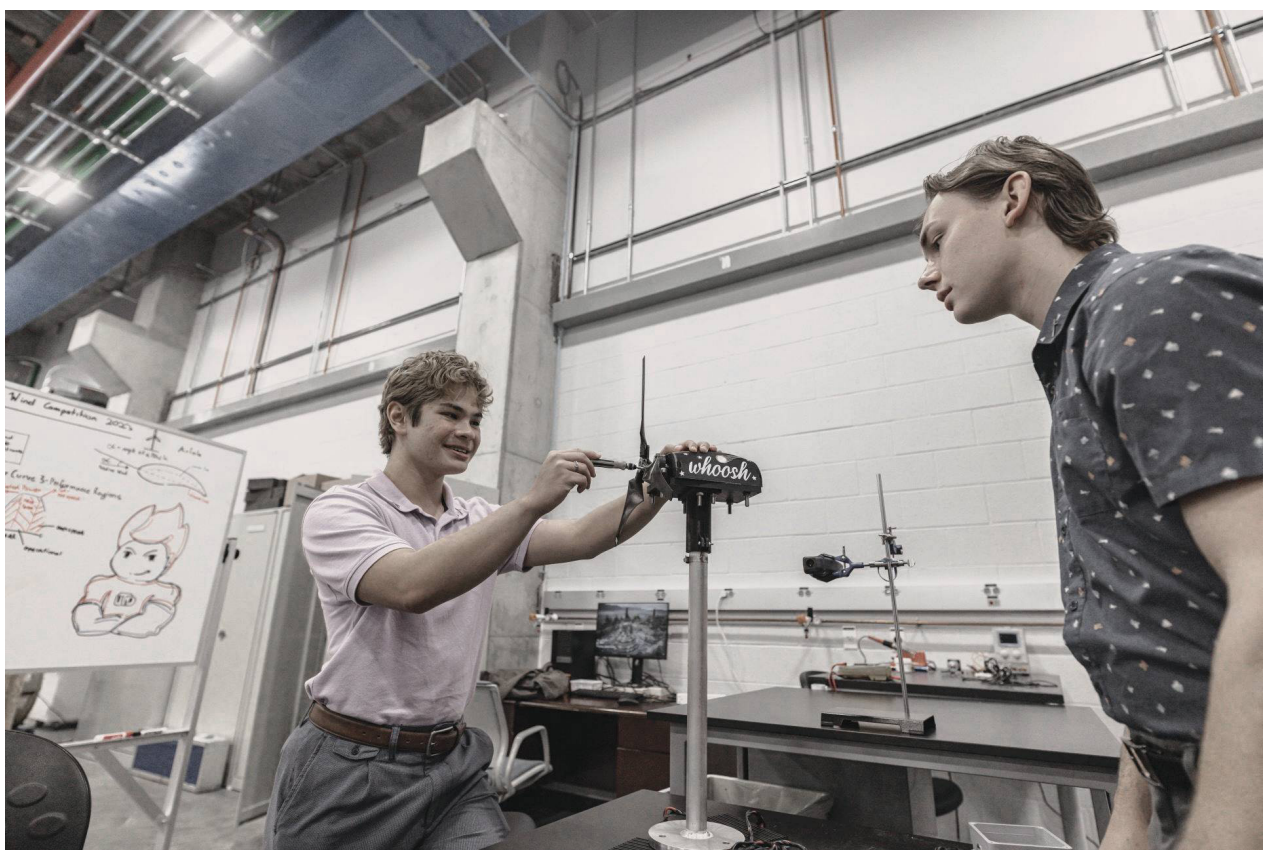
According to Varsha Thomas, computer engineering senior and team electrical lead, the main difference with designing an offshore turbine are the unique mechanical requirements.

"We don't have to make sure our electronics float," Thomas said. "We just have to make sure that they produce or convert the AC power to usable DC power. So that's a lot of what we do on the electrical side of things, but the challenges are mostly for mechanical … you have to make something that's stable enough to be in the water when wind is pushing at it."

The competition is split into three phases. Each team has roughly three months during the summer to prepare an initial submission, showing interest and qualifications for the event, and qualifying teams move onto Phase 2 during fall semester to construct preliminary designs and reports for the wind farm. Winners of Phase 2 advance to Phase 3, the weeklong final round, where teams test out their turbine designs and present their final reports. Out of over 50 teams competing this year, only the top 12 qualified for Phase 3.

"It felt really good," Tran said about the win. "We were quite worried this year because the challenges were so new, but we worked really hard, and we really appreciate all the work our members put in for all three of the sub-competitions because all three of our [propositions] had to be attractive to the judges for them to want to see us carry that out."

For Thomas, currently in her first year as team lead, helping Comet Wind make it all the way to the finals was a major relief.




UTD WIND | COURTESY

"When I'd become involved was when a lot of folks [had] been involved in the club for at least two years prior to when I joined," Thomas said. "So being mentored by them over the last year was a really great experience, but this year it was me getting my feet wet as lead, so to know that we qualified to finals, like, OK, I haven't screwed everything up, so it was a lot."

According to Tran, the Wind Energy Club was started by four passionate students in 2021 who discovered the collegiate competition and decided to start participating. One of the purposes of the club is to have a competition team, and Tran said that club membership has grown to about 40 active members in 2025, with nine official members on the Comet Wind team. But while the club has a strong focus on the competition, it also hosts socials for members to build a community interested in sustainability and green energy.. Tran said the club welcomes all majors, but generally sees more interest from engineering students and those seeking career opportunities.

"We have a lot of people that want to work in the wind industry or energy industry in the future more than just the general sustainability industry, and so they come to get the technical experiences that are provided in our club, but this year we have a great couple of members who are in [JSOM] that are on our project development team," Tran said.

With Phase 3's May 2 submission deadline on the horizon, Tran said the team is working in overdrive to finish its designs and bring them to life. The competition's final event will take place May 12-15 at the University of Colorado Boulder, where along with overall wins in first, second and third place teams can also win in connection creation, project development, turbine prototyping and turbine testing.

"The Wind Energy Club is a great group of people who are all passionate about making a better future for ourselves," Tran said. "So we would love any support, and we would love to invite people who are interested in learning about any of the technicalities of what it takes to supply clean energy to the world and what it takes to convince people that it is a reasonable solution that we should be pursuing."

---

**ILLEGAL**
CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

from the demonstration and stop harassing students. Ocampo said that by this point, Stein's cameraman were calling students slurs such as "faggot," "retard" and "tranny." Joshi said when Martín approached Stein, he was accompanied by two UTDPD officers as they tried to get Stein to "stop harassing our students" by leaving university premises. Throughout the disruption, YDSA demonstrators chanted "no amount of vitriolic attacks will stop us from existing" and "born-again bigots should go away." After the antisemitic comment from Stein, Joshi called for students to not engage with the "fascist disruptors." Joshi and Ocampo said they had been expecting something like this since Stein had also crashed the Trans Day of Visibility event hosted a day prior in downtown Dallas by the Party for Socialism and Liberation.

"He pushed people in the [downtown Dallas] crowd, he insulted them," Ocampo said. "Since he is based in the DFW area, he is able to interact with TPUSA quite frequently. He was actually on campus at the beginning of March. We were pretty sure he'd show up here as well."

At 2:41 p.m., the group of demonstrators began to march toward Chess Plaza. Ocampo and Joshi said they chose to leave because campus administration wasn't doing anything to stop students from being harassed. Stein walked to the front of the student group and held up a printout of Alyssa Nguyen's felony charges from the Plinth attack while yelling transphobic statements over the marching students' chants.

At 2:45 p.m., Winkler approached Stein and asked him to leave, saying the SU Mall and plaza area was a reserved space. In a recording obtained by *The Retrograde,* Winkler told the TPUSA students accompanying Stein that they should know the areas they are allowed to be in when demonstrating. Stein responded that "this is a public university, I am allowed to be anywhere," to which Winkler said she could guide them back to the areas where they could continue their counter protest. Stein said he would file a lawsuit because Winkler was "too stupid" to understand the First Amendment.

PHOTOS BY SURJADITYA SARKAR | RETROGRADE STAFF

> "Are you an illegal immigrant, Rafael? What are you going to do when I call ICE on you, Rafael?"
>
> **— Alex Stein**

Before disengaging with her, Stein asked if UTD was a highly-ranked school before saying it was a community college. He then pointed to Martín and called him a "glorified babysitter." Martín did not respond. This started a prolonged one-sided exchange between Stein and Martín.

"You are too stupid, Rafael, do you even know what the First Amendment is?" Stein said to Martín. "Are you an illegal immigrant, Rafael? What are you going to do when I call ICE on you, Rafael?" Martín did not respond to Stein's comments.

Alexander de Jesus-Colon, a political science graduate student, said the racist comment made by Stein toward Martín was "disgusting" and "stupid" at a time when ICE is actively arresting students for free speech and detaining people of Hispanic descent. Jesus-Colon said they were surprised that in what seemed like a blatantly racist attack, Stein apparently did not read the clear name tag that outlined Martín's high-ranking role at UTD.

"We have to dubiously ask about what your intentions are and what you're aiming for in this because quite frankly speaking, threatening people with ICE detention, when we've seen legal citizens get detained by ICE, where we've seen people who are Puerto Rican get detained and harassed, this becomes not only just a threat about his race but also an attempt to avoid accountability," Jesus-Colon said.

Art history graduate student Charlie Milton said they were going to a meeting with a professor when they saw the confrontation taking place and watched everything unfold. Milton's account corroborated those provided by Ocampo and Joshi. Milton said that after the confrontation with Martín and Winkler, TPUSA and Stein continued giving out flyers printed with Nguyen's personal information while making remarks about how trans people are violent and that YDSA is supporting "trans violence." Joshi and Ocampo said all of YDSA's advertising for the demonstration clearly indicated they were protesting how TPUSA was overemphasizing a single incident of violence from the Plinth attack to call for violence against all trans people, which created a feeling of hate on campus. Joshi said this hatred was only further exacerbated by outside instigators like Stein.

March 31 is not the first time TPUSA officers have disrupted another student event with transphobic and homophobic remarks. In October 2022, UTD alumni and former TPUSA member Kyle Randle interrupted Chi Alpha Iota diaternity's drag show by moving into the center of the performance and shouting that it was "non-Christ like." UTDPD detained Randle for this incident. Other right-wing groups have spread xenophobia across UTD's campus as well. Last fall, an organization known as the American Blackshirts Movement placed hateful neo-Nazi stickers targeting immigrants and queer students around campus, as part of what Alexandra Edwards, a professor at Texas Christian University currently researching North Texas fascists groups, identified at the time as a right-wing network that regularly cooperated with groups like TPUSA.

"It has really become a challenge to try to show up at your own university when there are people on campus whose sole aim is to threaten and demean other students based on their identity, and they only do it with an increased frequency," Milton said. "With administrator inaction, how are we as a student body even supposed to mitigate something like this?" *The Retrograde* reached out to Martín, who did not respond to a request for comment. UTD's chapter of TPUSA declined to comment.

---

# ConnectUTD wins SG election in tight race

**GREGORIO OLIVARES GUTIERREZ**
Editor-in-Chief

After weeks of campaigning, advocacy and debate, the Student Government spring elections concluded April 2, with ConnectUTD winning the executive race.

Led by neuroscience and psychology double major Giana Abraham and neuroscience sophomore David Baker, ConnectUTD ran on a platform focused on connecting students with state representatives and local officials while providing resources and support to student organizations. Abraham is now the president-elect and Baker the vice president-elect, both of whom are set to take office May 1.

When discussing their immediate plans upon taking office, Abraham and Baker both expressed concern about the 89th Texas legislative session, particularly because of the various bills targeting student organizations, diversity and higher education.

"I want to help try and coordinate a response to some of the legislation that's currently being put forward in the Texas House and Senate," Baker said. "These bills directly impact students, and I think having a coordinated response will help to reduce the impact that these bills could have or at the very least come up with plans to help protect students if these bills were put into place."

ConnectUTD is specifically concerned with how proposed funding cuts toward student groups related to diversity would impact the culture at UTD. Baker said he wants to begin meeting with student leaders as soon as possible to see what issues are most directly impacting students, and Abraham said she is concerned about how Texas' actions may negatively affect large student groups on campus such as ISA, SJP, PRIDE and oStem. Abraham also wants to expand the scope of ConnectUTD's outreach beyond just UTD.

"Considering the recent UT System drag ban, we want to reach out to schools across Texas and work on coalition building … to better prepare and coordinate a response," Abraham said.

Abraham said that in all her time in SG, she had not seen an election as competitive as the 2025 election. *The Retrograde* reached out to SG's elections board for the data behind the election results, but as of publication, no figures have been provided. Abraham said she and Baker plan on working hard to bring together the visions of ConnectUTD and Uplift UTD — the losing executive ticket — to better serve the campus community during what Abraham expects will be a challenging period for students. Abraham, however, remains hopeful about the change that could be brought to campus through inclusion.

"I want to make sure that everyone's voice is heard and that our diversity is celebrated as we work together to make this campus a better place for everybody," Abraham said.

*The Retrograde* reached out to Uplift UTD about potential plans to collaborate with ConnectUTD going forward. Uplift UTD did not respond.

---

**CHESS**
CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

people, and a complete breakdown of the tournament, matches and results can be found on Chess.com.

Webster chess coach and grandmaster Liam Le said his team was incredibly happy to have won the tournament. Le said part of Webster's unique support for its chess team is partnering with Chess.com to provide students diamond membership for free if they enroll in the school's chess minor.

"The students really love all the features provided by Chess.com," Le said. "And this has helped us keep growing, something we hope to continue in the next few years."

Annamaria Marjanovic, international master and woman grandmaster, said that as a Webster team member, she focused on supporting her peers in all their matches. Marjanovic said whenever she was not competing in a match, she was watching how her teammates and the other schools competed.

"This is not about individual efforts," Marjanovic said. "Our goal is about being the best team, so we avoid competing against each other and instead focus on supporting each other. It makes it easier to be happy for each other since we are scoring well."

Le said it was important to have a team culture that saw each match and tournament as the most important to minimize blunders and obtain victories.

"No matter how strong your players are, if you don't put in the work, you aren't going to succeed," Le said. "That is why we always try to work harder than everyone to come out on top."

UTRGV chess coach and grandmaster Bartek Macieja said that he was impressed by the level of organization UTD brought to the tournament in both 2024 and 2025.

"I am happy UTD hosted the President's Cup this year," Macieja said. "They always organize the event at the highest possible level. We saw it last year and this year was even better."

UTD officials said UTD qualified for the President's Cup for 20 out of the past 25 years, and plans on continuing to foster its chess players' skill through events like the pep rally hosted in the lead-up to the tournament. UTD chess coach and grandmaster Julio Sadorra commended all the teams this year.

"All games were hard fought from the beginning 'till the nail-biting finish as usual," Sadorra said.

# ‘The policy supersedes your First Amendment.’

## Admin prohibits SJP from chalking in first recorded application of 2024 chalking ban

**GREGORIO OLIVARES GUTIERREZ**
Editor-in-Chief

ALEXANDER LAWLESS | RETROGRADE STAFF

During a tabling event April 3, the Dean of Students Office prevented UTD Students for Justice in Palestine members from drawing with chalk at the Plinth before forcing them to remove their Palestinian flag, stating that university policy overrides their First Amendment rights.

SJP had reserved the Plinth from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. for its tabling and fundraising efforts by selling juice, keffiyehs and shirts. Around noon, SJP members began to draw out the words “Symbols of Palestine” near their table. By 12:40 p.m., Tricia Losavio, associate dean of health and wellness initiatives, arrived to stop SJP from using chalk. The SJP officers Losavio spoke to said it was their First Amendment right to express themselves with art. Losavio responded, “The policy supersedes your First Amendment.”

Losavio said if the students did not stop chalking, they would be violating SU policies, which would require disciplinary action. The SJP officers present asked what specific policy they were in violation of, at which point Losavio stepped away to make a phone call. Losavio then returned and said that she would email the policy they were violating if they gave her their names. The SJP officers refused to do so and asked if Losavio would speak with their lawyers over the phone, which she refused.

After a back and forth, Losavio agreed to send the policy to the UTD SJP Gmail account. Losavio’s email linked to the SU spaces policy page’s graffiti subsection, which prohibits graffiti anywhere in the SU spaces. The policy specifically highlights that chalk on sidewalks can be considered graffiti, and that, if found, an investigation will occur.

Groups including SJP have been using chalk on campus for years, with prominent uses of chalk as a form of protest occurring during the 2023-2024 academic school year in response to administration removing the Spirit Rocks. In the wake of last year’s encampment, UTD administration made a variety of changes to student free expression policy. One such change that took place before fall 2024 was a new prohibition on chalking.

On Aug. 29, Student Government received a document from UTD Administration titled “Speech and Expression Guidelines 8-28,” which UTD did not make publicly available at any point. The guidelines do, however, refer to the publicly available UTDSP5001. The guidelines said, “In adherence to UTDSP5001- Speech Expression and Assembly, acts such as chalking, painting, or drawing on any interior or exterior surfaces of the university are not permitted.” UTDSP5001 itself makes no reference to chalking.

The Retrograde reached out to the Dean of Students Office and Student Affairs regarding SJP’s alleged policy violation and a spokesperson for Student Affairs provided the following statement:

“Chalking or any manner of expression or programming that involves writing, drawing, painting, or similar acts on university buildings or structures, such as on walls, windows, pavement, etc. are not permitted as a means of expression under UTDSP5001 or UTDSP5002 regarding use of buildings, grounds, and facilities. This applies to members of the general public and all university affiliates.

Means of expression that are permitted under UTDSP5001 subject to reasonable restrictions on time, place, and manner are distribution of literature, use of signs and banners, use of tables, general exhibits and A-frames, amplified sound, public assemblies, and use of guest speakers.”

UTDSP5002, which focuses on the use of university facilities, also makes no mention of chalking.

Aysha Ahmed, political science sophomore and SJP organizer, said UTD was choosing to target SJP’s expression via chalking now when this hadn’t been an issue in the past. Ahmed said that groups like the Fellowship of Christian University Students had been allowed to chalk regularly on campus this year with no interference. The Dean of Students office declined to comment on the discrepancy in enforcement.

> “Acts such as chalking, painting, or drawing on any interior or exterior surfaces of the university are not permitted.”
>
> **— Speech and Expression Guidelines 8-28**

“As our movement has started to gain more traction on campus and in the world in general, we've noticed more and more oppression on minor things, including chalk, and this is just another example of that,” Ahmed said. “Their repression just proves how successful we are in getting our message across.”

UTD finance junior Kofi Jordan said that he thought it was ironic that when students like him took the time to draw artistic symbols of freedom, they immediately had their artistic freedom crushed. Jordan said that he chose to draw a dove to symbolize the peace and freedom he thinks everyone should have.

“I think everyone should be free,” Jordan said. “And I think everyone agrees that everyone should be free, so coming in with this aggression against freedom and a bird is really interesting to me. Why can’t they be opposed to the endless bombing of Palestine instead?”

At 2:10 p.m., an SU staff member forced SJP to take down their Palestinian flag because flag stands violated SU space policy. SJP took down their flag and, ten minutes later, zip tied it to the white poles near the Plinth to avoid having to use a flag stand.

Ahmed said that campus administration consistently said SJP blocked passageways, disrupted spaces, violated fire safety protocol and other similar infractions in a way that no other student organization experienced to silence their voices.

“All of these things are just examples of how they plan on repressing us,” Ahmed said. “Once they have reviewed their policy, in almost all these instances they have found we are actually doing nothing wrong and so we have been able to continue with our acts of protest because we are well within our First Amendment rights to protest. But that doesn’t stop the silencing effect their baseless violation claims have in the moment. They may try to silence us, but our voices deserve to be heard in the ways we choose to protest within our rights.”

**DRAG**
CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

published an open letter encouraging a similar ban within the UT System. The A&M System ban was challenged to a federal district court, where senior district judge Lee Rosenthal found the ordinance unconstitutional, as it violates free speech protects guaranteed under the First Amendment.

“The ban is an unconstitutional prior restraint on speech,” Rosenthal wrote in his judicial opinion. “The ban on drag shows is a viewpoint-based restriction on speech and expressive conduct.”

Following the court’s temporary block, Texas A&M University hosted Draggieland, an adults-only annual drag performance, on March 27. UT System’s drag ban has yet to be contested in a courtroom; however, with its many similarities to A&M’s ban, it appears to raise similar constitutional questions.

“No restrictions can be placed on ideological content or viewpoint expressed, and, to me, that absolutely includes drag,” Caden Brenner, sociology junior and UTD Student Government’s Diversity, Equity and Belonging Committee chair, said. “[It is] proof that the state government cares a lot less about your constitutional rights than their own political agenda.”

Brenner has led advocacy against the ban within Student Government, authoring SR 2025-08, a resolution calling the ban “a gross political overreach” and encouraging university actors to be “minimally compliant” with the policy. It further highlights that UTD, despite claims otherwise, does not fund any drag performances on campus.

In the 2024-25 academic year, there have been five drag events at UTD. XAI and other organizations use the shows as an opportunity for fundraising. For some, however, these events provide something more intangible than funds: comfort and community.

“It was just a place for these people to show off their costume making skills,” Owen Johnson, computer science junior and president of UTD PRIDE, said. “It’s something people like to put a ton of effort and creativity into. It’s just kind of sad that UTD is not only not here to help us but it’s also actively working against us.”

At the most recent Academic Senate meeting, administrators chose to revoke UTDPP1115, the current policy regarding how the university approaches students’ preferred names and pronouns. The policy states, for example, that “university communications and reporting” will use a student’s preferred name, gender identity and pronouns and faculty members are required to use students’ preferred names. Administrators cited concerns that parts of the policy may be in violation of 2023 Texas Senate Bill 17, which called for strict yet unclear guidelines on higher education. UTD administrators said the policy was in violation because it included the words “diversity,” “equity” and “inclusion”. Instead of reforming the policy internally and submitting a revision, Michael Kesden, physics professor and speaker of the Academic Senate, said university attorney Tim Shaw recommended UTD temporarily revoke UTDPP1115 in its entirety.

“What is currently being carried out by the registrar’s office is not actually in violation of SB 17,” Brenner said. “There didn’t seem to be an adequate explanation for why the policy had to come down if only a couple words here and there that weren’t actually operant in regard to the policy’s main functioning.”

The Office of Legal Affairs’ move may serve to satisfy the UT Board of Regents and the Texas legislature, both of which are calling for the removal of various gender-related ideologies from state institutions. It remains unclear, though, how the policy’s removal will affect students on a day-to-day basis. Many students at UTD have non-English names and often choose to go by a different name for simplicity. Others simply prefer to use a nickname with professors, yet without an official policy, the decision to collect preferred names will fall on individual administrators in the registrar’s office. Kesden said the university could continue to provide the resources established by UTDPP1115, there just would not be an associated written policy to support it. The Retrograde reached out to Shaw in the Office of Legal Affairs, who declined to comment.

“[We are] under the assumption that the registrar’s office will maintain the functional policy while it’s being revised over concerns that it violates SB 17,” Brenner said. “When we want protections for our students, having them codified in our handbooks is an important first step to making sure that we have them consistently.”

Even with students expressing concerns, there are few measures that students or school communities can take to influence the UT System Board of Regents. The board, consisting of nine members and one student regent, is appointed by Gov. Greg Abbott; the current board members have contributed more than $5.8 million to Abbott’s political campaigns. The board has historically been mired in controversy, with past appointees connected to widespread corruption, schemes of disallowed campaign contributions and whistleblower complaints of admission on the basis of wealthy influence rather than merit.

Despite those controversies, stricter regulations in favor of the board have surfaced in Texas’ legislature. Texas Sen. Brandon Creighton recently authored Senate Bill 37, legislation that would greatly expand the board’s power by allowing them to directly vet professors’ curriculum and university hiring decisions. The bill would also disallow university endorsement of any public policy or ideology, possibly making it illegal for professors to support values like democracy, free speech or the right to vote.

In his public testimony, Brian Evans, president of Texas’ chapter of the American Association of University Professors, said, “If anything is radical here, it is SB 37, which would take curriculum out of the hands of the subject matter experts … It would be a death knell for Texas’ standing as a top-tier education and research destination.”

As of publication, no policy has been introduced at UTD that specifically addresses the system drag ban.

# UTD advances plans to transition from Blackboard to Canvas

## Canvas will soon be available to UTD students, bringing new features and potential hiccups as the university moves to the new software

**MUAAZ ABED**
Staff Writer

UTD is moving forward with plans to fully transition from Blackboard Learn to Canvas by the 2026-2027 academic year.

According to a Feb. 9 email Provost Inga Musselman sent to Michael Kesden, physics professor and Speaker of the Academic Senate, the university plans to begin using Canvas shortly after its current contract with Blackboard, UTD’s current eLearning service, ends in November 2025. Both learning management systems will be supported until the complete transition to Canvas, planned for the 2026-2027 academic year. Electrical engineering junior Vyshnav Vijish says that he is looking forward to using Canvas once it starts being offered at UTD.

“I prefer Canvas, I used it when I was in high school and I thought [it] was way better,” Vijish said. “[I like Canvas’] automatic grading for all your classes. As long as your teachers were diligent about submitting grades on Canvas, you'd be able to see what [grade] you had in the class.”

In addition to having useful features like automatic grade calculation, Vijish said that Canvas offers a more intuitive user experience than Blackboard.

“I also think Canvas’ UI is much nicer. It's a lot cleaner and neater, even though it follows a lot of the same basic [design] principles [as Blackboard],” Vijish said. “[Canvas] just managed to [design] it way better, [because] Blackboard can be kind of confusing to navigate.”

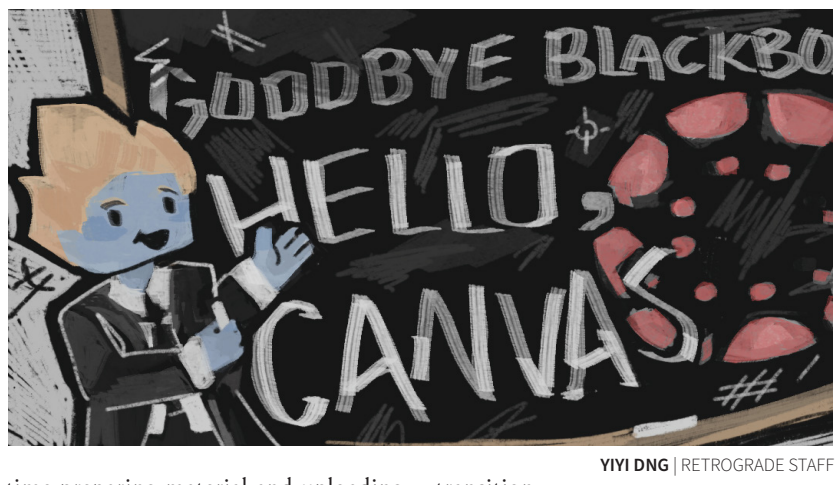
> “My hope is that there is ample support from the vendors of Canvas and from the university so that the transition happens efficiently.”
>
> **—Ravi Prakash**

When looking for new software to replace Blackboard, UTD tested several different learning management systems to determine the software best suited to the needs of students and faculty. According to Ravi Prakash, computer science professor and former speaker of the Academic Senate, Canvas was selected to replace Blackboard because of its performance during these tests.

“I believe last year … a message did go out to all faculty … asking faculty to volunteer and test drive the four candidate softwares,” Prakash said. “I test [drove] all the four candidates afterwards, which included Blackboard and the next generation of eLearning and Canvas and I think one or two other softwares. And then at the end of the test drives we all gave our opinion or assessment of the four, the pros and cons, and so on and so forth to all of them. And then they gathered all that information and made the decision.”

Despite being selected as the best candidate for the university going forward, the move to Canvas will still cause major upheaval as students and faculty acclimate to the new software. Prakash hopes that UTD will take the steps necessary to ensure the transition to Canvas occurs without issue.

“We've been using [Blackboard] for several years now … so lots of faculty have invested a significant amount of time preparing material and uploading it on [Blackboard], "Prakash said. “As we transition to Canvas, some of that material would need to be transferred to Canvas … So, my hope is that there is ample support from the vendors of Canvas and from the university so that this transition can happen very efficiently.”




YIYI DNG | RETROGRADE STAFF

According to Musselman’s email, the exact date Canvas will start being offered to UTD students and faculty will be finalized during the fall 2025 semester. As details are finalized, Prakash remains optimistic about the upcoming transition.

“[With Blackboard], I think I have a fairly good idea of how to use it,” Prakash said. “And though I don't use all the features … whatever I need, it supports, and I hope that Canvas will be the same if not better.”

*This is an ongoing story. Follow The Retrograde for additional updates on UTD's transition to Canvas.*

# Student Affairs deletes strike-focused, political content from Mercury website

## After spring break, UTD admin deleted and modified student-written articles, removed mentions of *The Mercury* being student-run

**GREGORIO OLIVARES GUTIERREZ**
Editor-in-Chief

**ANIKA SULTANA** | GRAPHICS EDITOR

*The Mercury's* website, utdmercury.com, went down for a few hours March 24 and returned online the next day with multiple modifications, after remaining unchanged since former Mercury staff went on strike in September last year. The only individuals theoretically capable of modifying the website are administrators in Student Affairs.

On March 25, the website no longer had a landing page, a website header or a search bar. Various links had been removed from the footer and the name "The Mercury" had been replaced by "The UTD Mercury." The following articles were completely or partially deleted from the website when it returned online March 25:

**News:**

"Mercury EIC fired by UTD"

"Former EIC appeals termination to Student Media Operating Board"

"Student Affairs prohibits SMOB from hearing former EIC's appeal, violating bylaws"

"Academic senate declares support for Student Government's Mercury strategy"

**Opinion:**

"Editorial: Reinstate Gregorio as EIC now"

"Using passive voice in Gaza coverage is more harrowing than you think"

Artwork of Ken Paxton was deleted on the piece "Paxtonism: A wild and wicked saga about intimidation and overall political fuckery. "

The March 25 footer was missing links to the Donate, Contributors, Podcast Episodes, Mission Statement, FAQ and Contact Us pages, with the contact and contributors pages appearing entirely deleted and completely scrubbed of all information, respectively. Without a search bar, none of the remaining pages can be easily reached from within the website and must be found through a search engine or accessed via URL. The September 16 newspaper page was also removed, as was the custom error page.

The mission statement page was heavily edited. It no longer mentions social media as a method *The Mercury* uses to publish content; has eliminated a paragraph about *The Mercury's* goal being to strengthen the skills of its staff; has removed a sentence that said UTD and *The Mercury* were committed to prioritizing nondiscrimination in its coverage and hiring practices; has removed a sentence that said that *The Mercury* should inform and entertain its audience while holding those in power accountable; and removed a sentence that said *The Mercury* was fundamentally a student-run organization.

The older iterations of *The Mercury* website, including now-deleted articles, pages and information, are accessible through the Wayback Machine. As of publication, the website has changed further, with its homepage reverted to the website layout *The Mercury* used in spring 2024 with an additional complete lack of links in the footer and a lack of website sections or a search bar.

*The Retrograde* reached out to various members of Student Affairs and the Office of Communications for comment on the significant changes made to *The Mercury's* website. As of publication, both offices have not responded.

Mathematics senior Avery Bainbridge was a member of the Student Media Operating Board up until the sudden end of its operations last semester. Bainbridge said SMOB has not had any meetings since October 2024, nor did it approve any of the changes made to the website.

At the March 26 meeting of the Academic Senate, Michael Kesden, physics professor and senate speaker, announced the policy to form a new Committee on Student Media had just been approved by President Richard Benson and that the Academic Senate would begin appointing its two members to the committee. The Staff Council, Student Government and Graduate Student Assembly all said they planned on having representatives appointed by mid-April. The changes to the Mercury website occurred after Student Affairs stopped calling meetings of SMOB and before the COSM formed, suggesting neither student media oversight committee was involved.

"It comes across to me as an effort to suppress negative reporting and details of the strike as part of a move to start a 'clean slate' new Mercury," Bainbridge said. "The intelligence of our student population is underestimated by the assumption that this plan would work."

Dominic Coletti, program officer for campus rights and student press at the Foundation of Individual Rights and Expression, said FIRE rarely saw an entire organization fired like what happened with *The Mercury* in October last year, and he had never heard of campus administrators taking down articles from a student-run website. Jonathan Gaston-Falk, staff attorney at the Student Press Law Center, said that SPLC was unaware of any instance of a student-media outlet being run or changed without student cooperation.

"Student media requires students," Gaston-Falk said. "Any resulting publication produced without students cannot be called student media and would necessarily be considered speech of the university itself."

Gaston-Falk said that student papers like *The Mercury* are historical records of what happens at universities, and by deleting articles, administrators are deleting and changing the historical record of a university. Gatson-Falk said this action also raised concerns about free speech and censorship.

"Eliminating content critical of authority figures by those authority figures themselves runs counter to the bedrock purposes of the First Amendment when it comes to speech on public college campuses," Gatson-Falk said. "Unchecked, this leads to a sanitization of student voices that are less interested in or completely withdrawn from holding our public officials and institutions accountable for their actions and decisions."

Coletti said that this action has major implications for the future of student press at UTD.

"It would be bad enough if the university were merely shutting down an outlet for completely viewpoint-neutral reasons, but especially in this instance, it looks like this is in direct retaliation to critical coverage that the paper is doing," Coletti said. "It sets a horrible precedent for student press, and it actively hurts the information environment on campus."

Coletti said it was critical for students and faculty to express their discontent with these changes with campus administrators because allowing unilateral changes would only endanger student press at UTD. Coletti said if *The Mercury* started publishing again without clear and substantive changes, it would be difficult for students to know if this was anything more than just another mouthpiece of the university.

"While no one is currently occupying the role of Mercury Editor-in-Chief, that does not mean that the university suddenly gets to subsume the entire paper and take over all of its editorial operations such as what articles are and aren't available," Coletti said, "And for the university to not just do that, but do that in a way that suppresses the viewpoints it doesn't like, is truly worrying from a First Amendment standpoint."

The Student Media bylaws, detailing how student media editorial freedom interacts with advisory board oversight, were tremoved from the UTD Student Media website following the Mercury student strike. With the bylaws removed from the UTD website and emphasis on student leadership no longer present in *The Mercury's* mission statement, Student Affairs no longer publicly highlights the student-led nature of *The Mercury.*

# Campus construction updates: current projects, upcoming residential, lab spaces

## UTD considers a new utilities plant, housing development and research building to meet the growing campus population's needs

**GREGORIO OLIVARES GUTIERREZ**
Editor-in-Chief

**UTD** | COURTESY

The University Campus Facilities Committee met March 28 to discuss the status of current campus construction projects and the future of ideas currently under review.

The committee focused on the lengthy construction process, the need for increased support services and current issues which the Office of Facilities and Economic Development seeks to overcome with new construction. With the completion of the first phase of the Athenaeum and ongoing work on the new student success center and student union complex, also known as "Big Momma," UTD will soon be at its maximum capacity for utilities unless more infrastructure is built to support the already over-capacity campus.

The committee, chaired by physics professor Bing Lv, includes Calvin Jamison, vice president for facilities and economic development, Matt Grief, associate vice president for housing, Jeremy Head, associate vice president for facilities and Bob Fishbein, associate vice president of operations and economic development. March 28 is the first official meeting of the committee since its members were appointed last September.

The most immediate changes current Comets will experience are developments around "Big Momma" and the Athenaeum. Jamison said that "Big Momma" construction is progressing rapidly; the building is still on track to be completed in late 2026 with an opening tentatively planned for 2027. Jamison said the completion of the Crow Museum as the first phase of the Athenaeum has helped redefine UTD as a school that values art, and the continued development of the second-phase performance hall will only further this notion.

"We are working on transforming how the public views our school, and this is part of our goal to put the A in STEAM," Jamison said.

Jamison said that campus infrastructure needs increased support and funding. While UTD has over 29,000 students enrolled, the Office of Facilities and Economic Development said in the committee meeting that the campus only has the space and resources to accommodate 27,000 students each day. Jamison said the current set up for the campus energy plant requires campus-wide shut downs to address what could otherwise be isolated issues, and that the work going on near Sirius Hall is part of a plan to address the aging infrastructure and allow isolated shut downs, with a planned end date in mid–May.

To keep up with the campus' utility demands, Jamison said a north utility plant will need to be created before any more construction can continue, because without it UTD cannot adequately service all of its buildings. Jamison said the campus has just enough capacity for its current construction programs.

"While a north utility plant is not funded, we are getting the design and programming started because that facility will be required before we bring on any additional projects on campus," Jamison said.

Grief, representing UTD Housing, said his office was in the earliest stages of programming for a 1,000-bed apartment complex planned to be built in the Lot T area north of Vega Hall. Grief said that because students have "a strong demand for privacy," the complex would have single bedrooms like the rest of UTD's on-campus housing.

"We find that many of the apartment complexes near campus are out of the reach of some of our students, so we hope to provide this new affordable option by fall of 2028 based on current projections," Grief said.

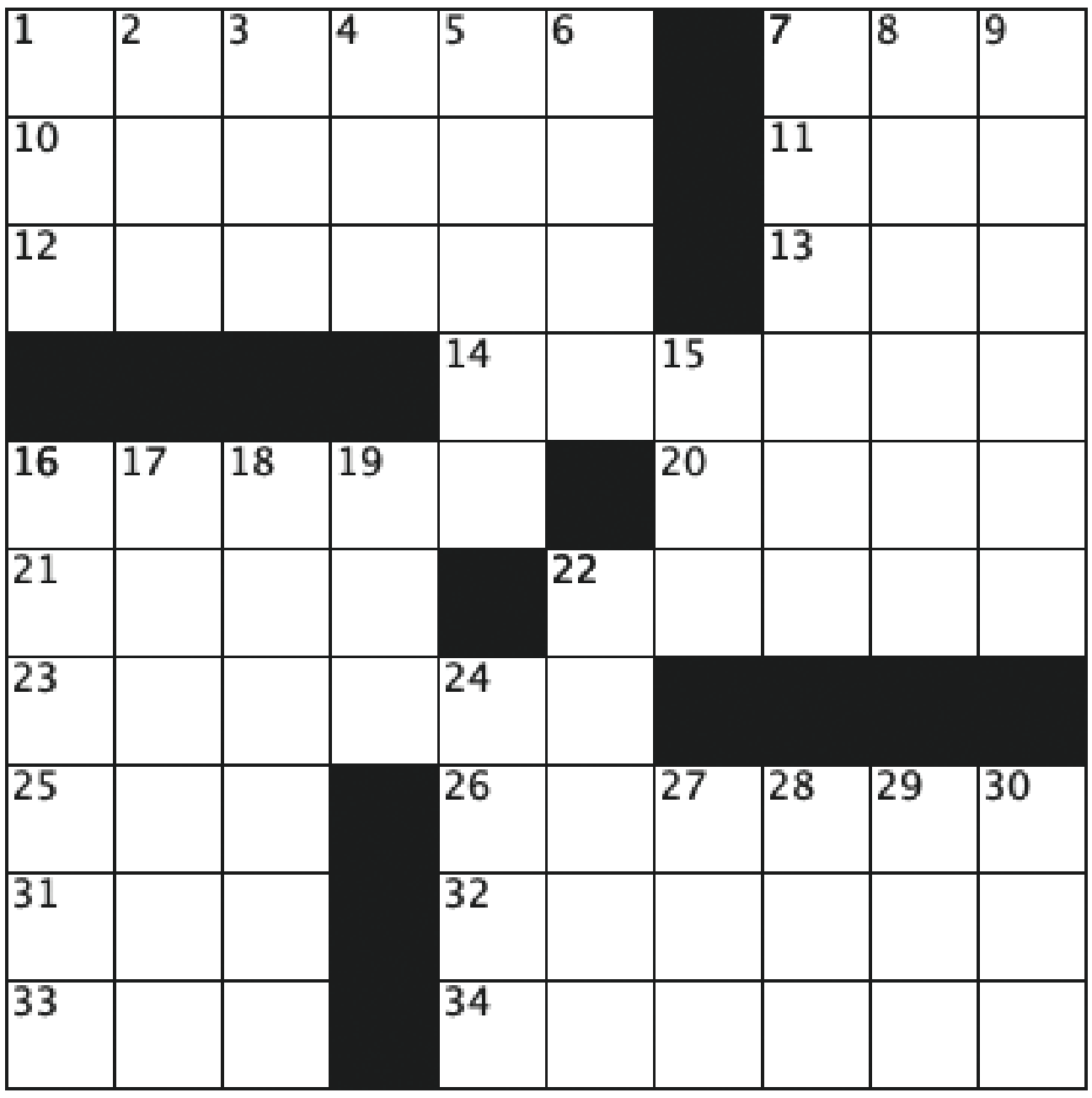
Grief said that the apartment complex would aim to have more affordable prices than what is offered by private entities like Northside, and it would include new retail locations for students on the first floor. Because the complex is still in the early stages of planning, Grief said no official timeline is currently available for the project.

Jamison said that UTD was also considering building a new mixed-use science building to accommodate the high demand for research and instructional labs on campus. He said the current plan is to construct a four-story research building with a basement, using the ground floor as instructional lab space with the rest of the floors reserved for research labs.

Jamison said most of the buildings UTD has planned are on a funding waiting list based on need, and that sometimes projects such as the Athenaeum could jump the line if donors provided gifts specifically for their construction. As funding comes in, more buildings will be constructed to meet campus needs.

"Bottom line is that you can do anything with enough money," Jamison said.

# Initial Here



**ALANA PLATT** | RETROGRADE STAFF

## Across

1 Greek goddess of the hearth
7 Swiss peak
10 *Signs with lines, as seen on SNL
11 Debussy's "La ___"
12 Surgeon's stitch
13 "Give ___ rest!"
14 *"Magic Mike" selling point
16 First, second, third and home
20 ___ de vivre
21 "I could ___ horse!"
22 Zero-calorie drink
23 *Underwater creature whose males give birth
25 Silent communication syst.
26 With 32-across, an envelope-slitting tool... or a hint to the starred clues
31 Fannie ___
32 See 26-across
33 UFO crew
34 Dana ___, co-star of the original "Invasion of the Body Snatchers"

## Down

1 Command ctrs.
2 Old French coin
3 Warmed the bench
4 "Ur so right"
5 Actor Elba
6 "Wait ___!"
7 "That describes me, right?"
8 Didn't water, as a plant
9 Urgent request for a miracle, say
15 1977 Steely Dan album
16 Turned into
17 Verbally reacts to in awe
18 Sash worn at graduation
19 Corn unit
22 Tearful
24 Not busy
27 Start of a countdown
28 Palindromic explosive
29 Wide shoe size
30 School basics, initially

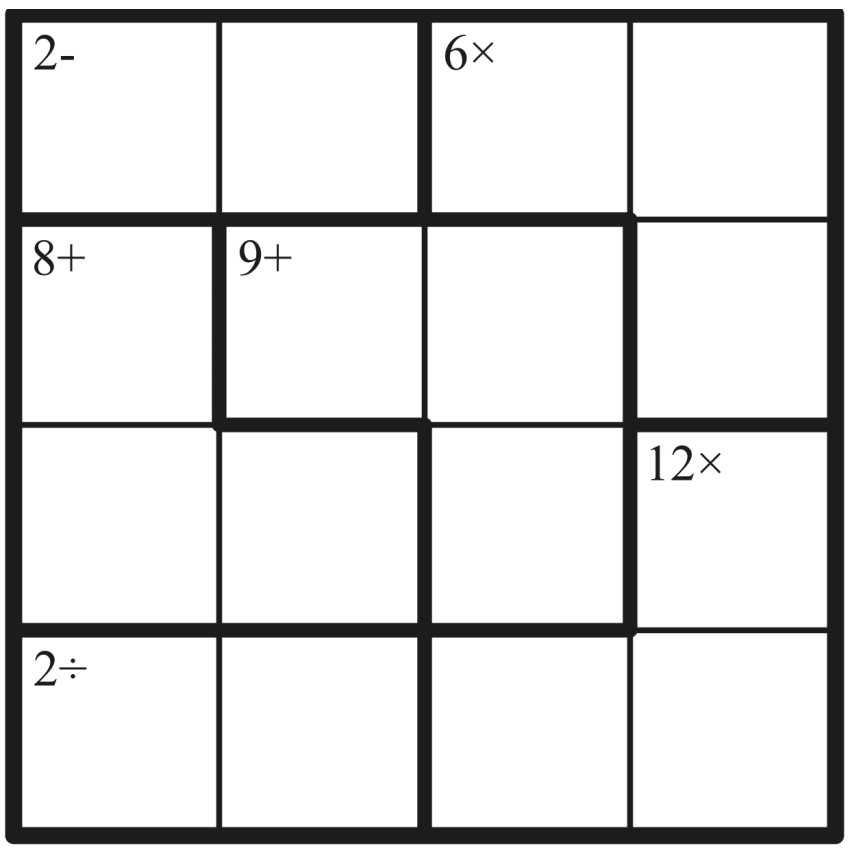
## "Dot Your I's" solution

This puzzle ran in the March 24 edition of *The Retrograde*.

For more puzzles, visit *The Retrograde*'s website or grab a paper on campus.

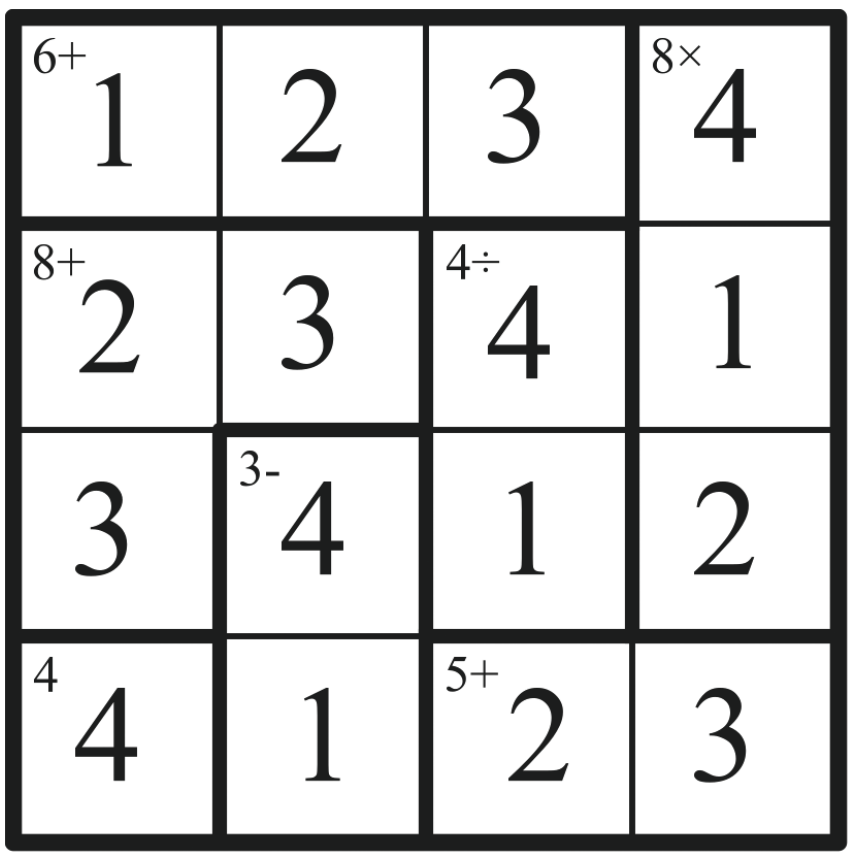
# 04/07 KenKen

**Instructions:** Your goal is to fill up the 4×4 grid with numbers 1-4. Each column and row must have exactly one of each number, just like in sudoku. Each box (an area outlined with thick black lines) has a target number and a mathematical operation listed in the top-left corner. The numbers within the box must result in the target number when the mathematical operation is employed. For example, a box with 3+ could be satisfied with 1 and 2, as 1+2=3. Similarly, a box with 2÷ could be satisfied with either (1,2) or (2,4), as 2÷1=2 and 4÷2=2. Visit our website for a full walkthrough.




**RAINIER PEDERSON** | RETROGRADE STAFF

## Example of a complete KenKen:




## Interested in making crosswords for *The Retrograde*?

Have a knack for clever clues? Love a good wordplay moment? Current Retrograde crossword constructer Alana Platt will be holding a seminar on crossword construction on Monday, April 21 from 6 p.m. to 7 p.m. via Microsoft Teams. Platt has made crosswords for *The Mercury*, and now *The Retrograde*, for 2 years and has been published in The New York Times.

**Topics covered include:**
- Recommended Software
- Theme Development
- Designing and Filling a Grid
- Clue Writing
- And more!

Whether you're a puzzle pro or just crossword-curious, we welcome students from across the UTD community. New to crossword construction? No problem! If you've got an idea but need help bringing it to life, we're happy to lend a hand. Just reach out — we're friendly, promise.

Please RSVP at **www.tinyurl.com/xword-seminar** or by scanning the QR code to the right. The RSVP form does not close.

We can't wait to see (and solve) the puzzles you come up with!

SCAN HERE!

**ADVERTISEMENT**

THE CROW MUSEUM OF ASIAN ART
AT UT DALLAS PRESENTS:
FRIDAY, APRIL 25TH, 2025
10 AM - 10 PM
ART-A-THON
T-SHIRT DESIGN COMPETITION:
GRAND PRIZE FOR WINNER!
REGISTER NOW:
BREAKFAST WITH TEMOC
CHALK BLOCK, TIE-DYE, LANTERN MAKING, AND MANY MORE CRAFTS!
CANDY ART COMPETITION
SCAVENGER HUNT
AI ROBOTIC SKETCH ARTIST
DRESS TO IMPRESS COMPETITION
AWARDS CEREMONY
STUDENT ORG PERFORMANCES & FREE FOOD
EDITH AND PETER O'DONNELL JR. ATHENAEUM
COME FOR THE ART, STAY FOR THE FUN!

# THE ASTRONOMY AND COSMOLOGY SOCIETY: FROM VIEWING THE STARS UP ABOVE TO CONNECTING WITH THOSE DOWN BELOW

## ACS allows students to learn about their place in the universe and solar system while forging lasting friendships at home on Earth

**NANDINI SINGH**
Life & Arts Editor

UTD's Astronomy and Cosmology Society is unlike many other student organizations on campus. Instead of membership dues and event attendance requirements, the club runs purely on passion and curiosity, allowing anyone interested in space — from novice to expert — the chance to explore what lies beyond.

The club's development began in spring 2023, when then-sophomore psychology student Haroon Mangrio realized there was no astronomy club on campus. Seeking members, he found just the amount for the club to take off. Since then, it has grown to more than 60 members and is advised by astrophysics professor Mustapha Ishak-Boushaki, who engages in dark matter and dark energy research on campus.

"I had never founded an organization before, I had no idea how to do [it]," Mangrio said. "You have to have five people to sign on to start the club, [and I thought] where do I find five people to do this with me, but I did, actually. We are definitely finding our feet as a club, but there is enough support on campus."

From observing the night sky to studying planetary movements, astronomy may appear to be a solo activity. Yet, for Mangrio, learning about space in a group setting where people can bond with one another on top of seeking knowledge, creates a wholesome experience. A visit to the planetarium or the local IHOP after a club meetup, it's these new friendships that stick out most.

"My whole goal for the club was for it to be laid back and social, so that it can be as inviting as possible," Mangrio said. "My favorite memories of the club don't have anything to do with [the] research side, it's more about the people."

Student organizations with membership fees are usually career-focused and help with entering the workforce, according to Rishikesh Venkat, neuroscience senior and club vice president. On the other hand, interest-based clubs like the Astronomy and Cosmology Society give students the time and space to explore hobbies unrelated to their daily work. While astronomy is closely related to careers in physics or aeronautics, the club's members hail from a diverse range of majors, those from psychology to economics. Venkat shares that the relevance and importance of astronomy is not limited to one group, but to all majors including the non-science majors. No matter one's major, the human desire to explore the unknown remains.

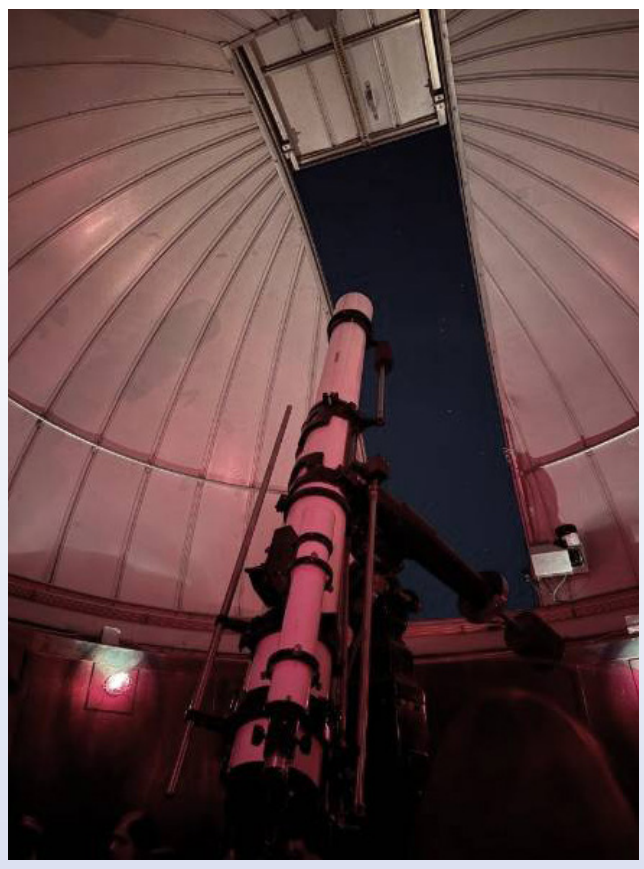
"[When you learn] about space, it's gearing up to what's coming," Venkat said. "It is the last frontier left for humanity, [we ask] what's out there, is there life out there, [are] there resources out there that we can use."

In the past few years, many astronomical events have drawn large crowds, namely the total solar eclipse in April last year. While these larger events are a driving point for further engagement and contribution in astronomy and cosmology-focused organizations, Venkat said that lesser-known events also have a strong place in the field. One example close to home: the University of North Texas' monthly "star parties." Recently, the club attended one of these partes at the Rafes Urban Astronomy Center, where members could stargaze and connect with fellow community members who share their passions.

"Solar eclipses [and] astronauts coming down from space after days doesn't happen that often," Venkat said. "[Yet] things like rockets being launched up into space, that's not something a lot of people tend to think about, but if you love space you realize what a big deal it is."

To encourage the growth of the club and ongoing member interest, the members and officer board have carefully considered its meeting spaces and frequencies. It may seem as though clubs require consistent meeting places and regularly scheduled events to succeed, yet according to Venkat, their non-regular meetups are a driving force for each member to have a fresh and wondrous attitude towards anytime they do meet.

"One of the biggest things that drive the interest in our club is the member's own interest," Venkat said. "We realized that having those regular meetings, those requirements, takes away the joy out of the club."



UTD ASTRONOMY AND COSMOLOGY | COURTESY

**Student members of the UTD Astronomy and Cosmology Society use high-powered telescopes to study the night sky.**

For Mangrio, his innate nature of curiosity initially sparked his interest in the solar system with his interest in knowing how small individuals are in the universe, and how we are made up of stardust, from the iron in our blood and the phosphorus in our DNA. He believes most everyone has the curiosity to spark a love for astronomy, recommending books such as Pale Blue Dot by Carl Sagan and Astrophysics for People in a Hurry by Neil DeGrasse Tyson as starting points for those wanting to begin their own journeys into learning about space.

Space can prove to be a very technical field, with facts both known and unknown appearing abstract. While space-focused careers require advanced-logical thinking conceptual mastery, Venkat shared that the club presents a more holistic view, encouraging the art of learning foremost.

"The whole point about the club is [being] curious," Venkat said. "I came in knowing half as much as the room, [but] we don't look at it that way, we look [at] it as everybody is a member."

Along with learning about the solar system and the development of the universe, studying astronomy also provided Venkat insights into the environment here on Earth. This understanding gave him a new perspective, as well as a newfound push to learn more and be an advocate for environmental change.

"My sophomore year I was driving to Houston, [it was] pitch black, and I looked up and just saw stars," Venkat said. "You really [become] aware of how much the cities diminish it and realize it's not [an] individual effort."

Both Venkat and Mangrio, as seniors, share hope for the club's future. Venkat hopes the club seeks opportunities in research now that the club has begun its growth. To him, this means answering questions of applying astronomy and cosmology to people's everyday lives, along with focusing on the members themselves and their college major/minor applications to the field. Mangrio hopes for members to find connections on campus and to forge lifelong friendships, an individual goal he himself met through this club.

The club's next adventure begins with a collaboration in the works with Whiskers and Soda, a coffee shop that has cats roaming around, a nod to the club's unofficial name: "The Astronomy & Cosmology Society (and Cats)!" Students interested in joining the club can fill out the interest form and visit the Instagram page, @utdastrocosmo, for up-to-date information.

"Astronomy can be a great way to connect people," Mangrio said. "Stargazing on its own has been such a pastime of the human race, and I [find] that community and astronomy are inseparable."

KRIS IKEJIRI | COURTESY

**VPAS Senior Abbi Boyd, in green, performs in "Disaster!" a play organized by the Grand Prarie Arts Council, directed by Lon Barrera with stage management by Samantha Padilla.**

# "Disaster!" takes audiences along a comedic, campy ride through the '70s

## A reckless casino-boat full of wild passengers undergoes a series of crises, ending in inevitable shipwreck

**TYLER CRIVELLA**
Staff Writer

From earthquake to heartbreak, the Grand Prairie Arts Council, known as GPAC, successfully delivered on promises of a zany musical romp, bringing lighthearted fun to the historic Uptown Theater stage from March 14 to 23.

"Disaster!" is a '70s-themed jukebox musical, essentially a compilation of songs loosely tied together by a plot that acts as a vehicle simply to hit more songs, like "I Will Survive" and "Hooked on a Feeling." By that design, it should be no surprise that the show quickly spirals out of control into a full-fledged disaster: a group of campy characters board a health-code-violating casino-boat and struggle to survive a series of crises, presenting a roller coaster of events for both the play's characters and audience as love and death alike overtake its passengers.

The cast included VPAS senior Abbi Ray Boyde, who played in the ensemble. Even in a role with fewer lines, Boyde consistently brought a large presence to the stage, with noticeably detailed stage business and coordinated choreography. After acting in numerous plays on the UTD stage, the actor made their professional debut playing Andrina last July in the Dallas Theater Center's "The Little Mermaid."

Others in the cast also brought a powerful wave of energy, placing a diverse mix of characters onto the show's doomed casino-boat. Amid a not-so-devout nun, raunchy casino owner and disco icon, one would expect it to be difficult to keep up with everyone, yet each actor embraced their character's unique quirks enough to differentiate them in the mind of the audience.

Some actors played their role notably well, guiding the show with a warm yet comedic energy. Grant Hollowell serves as a wonderfully villainous Tony Delvecchio, the deceptive casino owner, carrying a bold energy and throwing a new cigarette offstage in every scene. Briana Berk, in auditory character alone, hits all the notes of Sister Mary Downy. And, in an unexpected twist for a jukebox musical, Cathy Pritchett garnered true emotional waves in the audience with her portrayal of a progressively dying Shirley Winters.

"Disaster!" is unapologetically corny, relying on dense wordplay to somehow make more than 25 songs work in a single context. The opening song "Hot Stuff," for example, is justified as a player's pick-up line practice, a scientist's search for volcanic sediment and restaurant heating instructions all at once. There is no lack of witty wordplay in the show; thankfully, the cast and crew make use of the ample material through well-timed delivery.

Like its script, Uptown Theater itself holds quasi-nostalgic representation of

SEE DISASTER, PAGE 8

# Comet Con brings your childhood back

## Experience your younger self for a day on campus

**MAR OLOGBAN**
Staff Writer

The smell of maple syrup, bright colors and the sound of cartoons filled the air at the Student Union on a special Thursday in spring. Comet Con 2025 took place March 27 and allowed Comets to return to the days of their childhood.

Comet Con is a day-long mini fan convention held annually on campus, centering the media many Comets grew up watching and playing. The day is full of activities and panels, such as an artist alley full of local vendors selling anime merchandise, Red Bull samplings, an anime orchestra performance and more. Comets could stop by the SSA Gaming Wall for a free haircut, battle with Beyblades in the SU Artemis Halls or attend a panel hosted by anime industry experts. The artist alley featured all sorts of anime related crafts and artistic creations that Ademorede Adekanye, a healthcare studies senior, found herself fascinated by.

> "I genuinely enjoy the artist alleys that are held on campus because I love seeing all the cute trinkets and amazing artwork that our student population has to offer."
> **— Ademorede Adekanye**

"I genuinely enjoy the artist alleys that are held on campus because I love seeing all of the cute trinkets and amazing artwork that our student population has to offer," Adekanye said. "I've only been to WeebCon and FanExpo but from the little experience I have, I think that the artist alleys on campus are pretty similar to the ones at official conventions."

Comet Con, although smaller than a more typical fan convention, is still worth attending. Conventions of any size always have something unique to offer, and Comet Con offers some things that bigger conventions are starting to not provide as much compared to the early 2000s and 2010s — a solidified community. Comet Con is also free to attend, unlike the typical $75 price tags for three-day conventions in the Dallas area.

Comet Cosplay and Anim3 were a couple of organizations at the head of Comet Con, hosting the cosplay competition and anime orchestra performance as some of the day's final events. The cosplay contest had open admittance, inviting everyone to sign up with the added benefit of a chance to win a free Funko pop for competing.

"I've heard of the anime orchestra since I was a freshman, but I have never checked it out on my own or had the opportunity to see them perform," Adekanye said. "I think they did really well, and I was surprised at how many talented people there were in a singular club."

With fan conventions being a relatively niche hobby, many students are unaware of the excitement of Comet Con events. In an effort to attract attention, the sprawling nature of the event, spread out across the whole campus, drew hundreds of attendees throughout the day and generated a buzz for the activities that ran late into the night. Damani Lumpkin, a VPAS senior, stumbled into Comet Con without knowing what the events were for and ultimately ended up enjoying what they found.

"It was a nice experience to see students come together to embrace a community they're passionate about," Lumpkin said. "As well as see them in a creative light and share their stories."

SUAAB, the main organization running Comet Con this year, hosts free programs for Comets regularly with significant events scattered throughout the year. The next major event will be Springapalooza in from April 23-24, which brings music performers, competitions and more to campus at no charge. As of publication, SUAAB has not released any additional information about the Springapalooza event schedule.

# Wild art: Love between the chain links

Mourning doves (*Zenaida macroura*) are widespread across most of the contiguous U.S., including the urban and suburban parts of Texas, and can often be observed in monogamous mated pairs. The male dove can be distinguished from the female through its longer tail and a brighter, iridescent patch of feathers on the nape.

PHOTOS BY SURJADITYA SARKAR | RETROGRADE STAFF

# Wild art: Turning the volume up

Strings Attached, one of UTD's most well-known music clubs, hosted "Metal Night" Feb. 26, drawing fans of heavy metal music and its subculture together from across the student body.

PHOTOS BY LYNN CHEN | RETROGRADE STAFF

PHOTOS BY SURJADITYA SARKAR | RETROGRADE STAFF

# Wild art: A night in concert with professor, pianist Kelly Durbin

Music professor and UTD's very own jazz pianist Kelly Durbin performed in a four-man ensemble March 22 at the Jonsson performance hall, filling the evening with jazzy tones.

**DISASTER**
CONTINUED FROM PAGE 7

a recent past. Under the grand marquee sign, Uptown Theater bears more than 70 years of history in its red carpets and Gatsby-esque interior. Admittedly, younger crowds might feel a bit out of place in a crowd that, at several times, sang along to the musical's popular beats. There exists a clear generational gap between the average student and the expected audience member. Despite the dissonance, the theatre's atmosphere is overwhelmingly homely: even the concessions, under the leadership of Cindi Brickett, were mainly handmade and relatively affordable.

While the front of house staff focused on clientele comfort, the back of house crew served audiences a well-staged technical performance. Instead of simply asking for a park-and-bark style — a blocking format with minimal movements — like most other jukebox musicals, "Disaster!" is a challenge of a script with its many full-stage transformations. Apart from calling for a variety of vastly different rooms, Act II of the book directs a flood and an entire upside-down flip of the show's casino-boat.

Presented with a technically difficult musical, the technical crew generally answered with great success. The running gag of increasingly insane sound effects as bodies and dishes, among other items, are thrown offstage added to many comedic beats. Many creative solutions to the disasters of "Disaster!" illustrate a thoughtful connection between technicians: cloths, projections, sounds and small-scale props came together during critical scenes to create compelling stage pictures of crises.

Yet, there were some less-than-ideal moments in the technical prowess of the performance. Overhead lights, especially in center stage, felt underutilized, leaving a shadow on actors for sometimes extended periods of time. The stage platform was consistently pushed a little too far stage left, distracting from a generally symmetric set. And, most importantly, the moments of stage-wide earthquake lacked coordination between actors and technicians as cues either lagged significantly behind or appeared far earlier than actors' movements. Though already hard to illustrate in a stable theater, these serious moments in the script often took audiences out of the action with a collapse in suspension of disbelief.

These issues, though, are clearly an anomaly rather than the majority of how the Grand Prairie Arts Council conducts itself. UTD students might find the half-hour drive long; however, the shows are a great way to spend a weekend with others in search of a cozy theatrical performance.

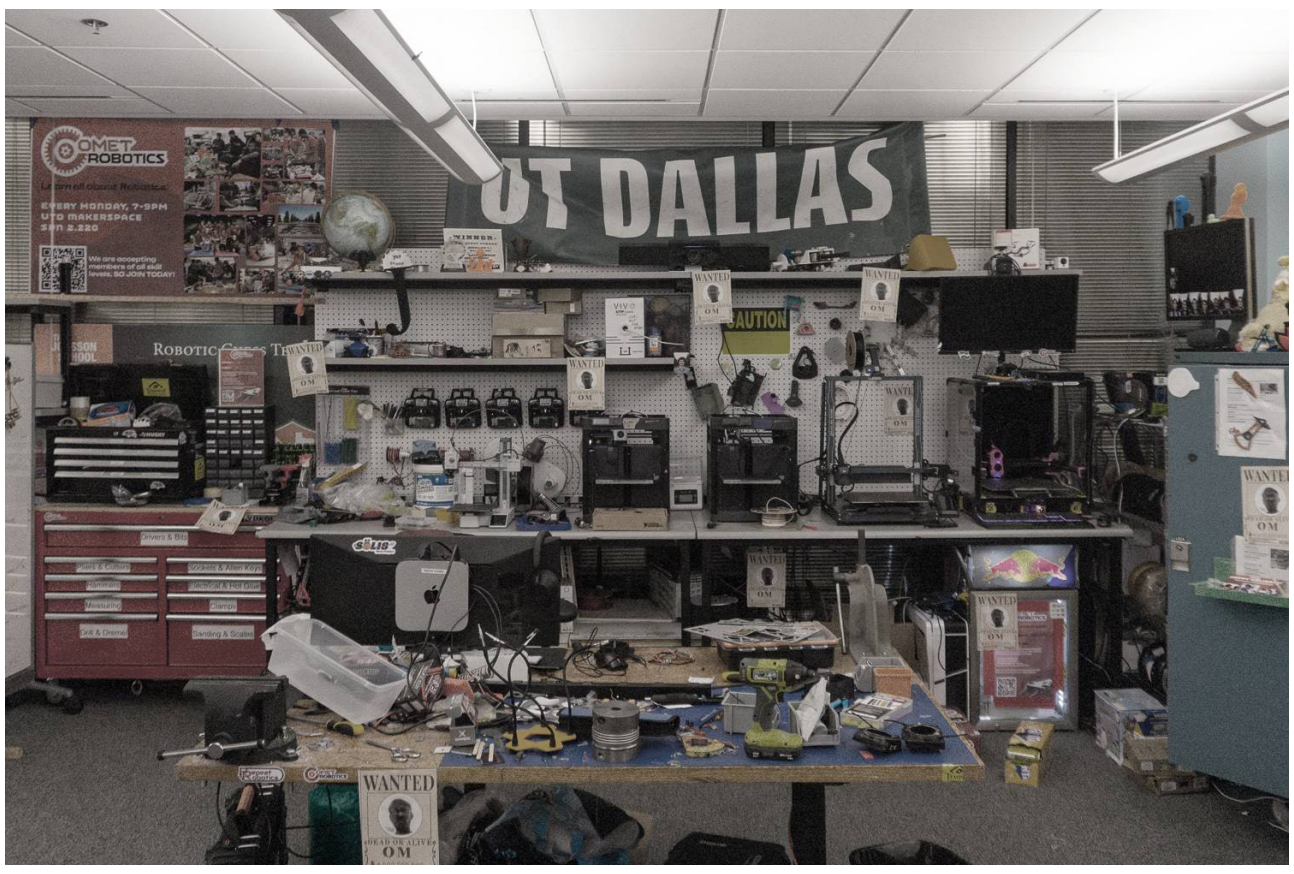
GPAC's 2025 season is only just beginning. Auditions for their upcoming Percy Jackson themed musical "The Lightning Thief" are upcoming in late April. For those who simply want to enjoy the popular book's musical adaptation, the show will run from June 13-22, with more information on GPAC's website.

As the show is specifically seeking young adults, it may only be a matter of time before another UTD actor lands on the Uptown Theater stage. And, considering the probable use of technical effects to invoke magical moments, GPAC has an opportunity to demonstrate its ability to successfully coordinate stage-wide dynamics that were somewhat off-putting in "Disaster!" The more contemporary musical, with a younger cast, may find itself staring down similar obstacles of synchronization — or it may find itself with a new spirit of energy and talent.

No matter its future, GPAC proved that its 2025 program is on par to be anything but a "Disaster!"

# Enter a crafter's haven at the UTDesign Makerspace

## The student-led makerspace offers Comets a variety of difficult to come by tools for their creative or technical projects



SURJADITYA SARKAR | RETROGRADE STAFF

**The UTDesign Makerspace is home to an array of tools that UTD students and student organizations can use to pursue a variety of creative projects as diverse as making rockets, building robots or making your own cosplay outfit.**

**MAR OLOGBAN**
Staff Writer

*Editor's Note: Originally published on web March 24, 2025.*

In a concrete-walled room the size of a warehouse tucked away on the northern edge of campus, a sewing machine whirs as a Comet turns a fabric pile into a flowy dress. Beside them, another Comet laser cuts panels of wood while a 3D printer spits out robot parts. This multipurpose makerspace, run by UTDesign, is the often-underappreciated heart of crafting at UTD.

The UTDesign Makerspace offers students and staff an area to work on crafts while offering an abundance of resources. Created in 2015 by Rod Wetterskog — ECS assistant dean and the head of UTDesign — with the goal of creating an advanced fabrication space open to everyone in the UTD community, the makerspace. The Makerspace has continued to operate on the second floor of the SP/N buildings from 7 a.m. to 9 p.m. on weekdays since its foundation under Wetterskog. A decade later, UTDesign Studio Assistant Manager Tim Givens shares the same sentiment as Rod, believing that the space is full of opportunities.

> "To have that [The Makerspace] as a free resource is very helpful and it attracts a lot of attention whenever we bring up that that's a resource."
>
> **— Lauren Mangu**

"I've been using and advocating for makerspaces for several years, [since] joining the UTDesign team during the '22 fall semester," Givens said. "My intention is to grow Makerspace into a resource that all Comets can utilize and be proud of."

The Makerspace offers equipment such as resin and 3D printers, sewing machines, power analyzers and more. This type of equipment is pricey and typically inaccessible to a university student, making their presence at the Makerspace helpful and unique. The website for the Makerspace offers training for much of the equipment and has a full list of resources available.

While overseen by the UTDesign program, the makerspace is led entirely by students and is partially funded through its multiple nonprofit partners across North Texas, such as Dallas Makerspace, TheLab.ms Makerspace and Mouser, which also offer mentorship to students. But while the donations and teaching activities are crucial for the makerspace's longevity, Givens doesn't believe they define the space.

"I think the true heart of UTDesign Makerspace is in our student organization partnerships," Givens said.

The Makerspace also partners with organizations such as Comet Robotics, the Student Game Developer Association, the Wind Energy Club and more who use the space for weekly meetings. They build robots, have game jams and use special storage and tables reserved specifically for partnered organizations.

One of the campus organizations partnered with the Makerspace is Comet Cosplay, a club focused on the cosplay community on campus. Lauren Mangu, a physics senior and the organization's president, said she is grateful for the partnership.

"To have that [The Makerspace] as a free resource is very helpful and it attracts a lot of attention whenever we bring up that that's a resource," Mangu said. "Some people become more inclined to actually start cosplaying now that they know that they can buy their materials but use these specific tools for free."

The Makerspace offers many tools useful for crafting cosplay outfits and accessories, such as 3D printing, tools to cut EVA foam and wood and sewing machines. All the tools are free to use and are either donated or a part of the actual Makerspace itself.

"It really helps to have those kinds of things that are very prominent or at least very widely used in the cosplay community in general," Mangu said.

Mangu said having the Makerspace as a resource is useful because of the hands-on interactive experience one can have with the right machines. Mangu believes that the Makerspace makes a typically inaccessible hobby something anyone can get into.

"It feels really good," Mangu said. "Having a space that caters to things like that [cosplay] and also as an org being recognized by them to be able to … partner with them and for them to recognize us."

# 'We don't know we're here. It's time we change that.'

## How a UTD alumnus launched *Bayanihan Press*, the first-ever newspaper focused on DFW's Filipino community

**MARIA SHAIKH**
Managing Editor

*Editor's Note: Originally published on web Feb. 17, 2025.*

Nearly seven months ago, UTD psychology alum André Averion launched *Bayanihan Press,* a news publication designed to give DFW's Filipino community a voice. After nearly forty published articles, covering everything from community events to local and national politics' impacts on Filipinos in Dallas, the outlet has integrated itself into the slowly-blossoming network of events, groups and resources serving local Filipino Americans.

Launched Aug. 2, 2024, the publication is written and edited by Averion, who formerly served as the Outreach and Distribution Manager of UTD's former student newspaper *The Mercury*, and is currently the Communications Chair and Website Manager of Pilipino American Community Endeavor, a nonprofit focused on advocating for the Dallas-area Filipino community. PACE currently hosts *Bayanihan Press* on its website. Averion said his journey toward joining PACE and launching the publication was a gradual progression coinciding with a lifelong struggle to understand his half-Filipino identity.

"I was raised here [in DFW], and … I lived in a small part of Fort Worth [where] there were barely any Filipinos at all," Averion said. "And my parents wanted me to be raised [so] I would be all-American besides the principal foundations of what it means to be Filipino, such as valuing family and some basic traditions. I knew next to nothing of my culture besides that and food. So eventually I tried to meet other Filipinos in Keller, there were like four in my grade … and they were the same way. Their families had decided that for the betterment of their success in the future, that they should be more American, not Filipino. And that kind of stuck with me for a while."

After he began attending UTD, Averion joined the Filipino Student Association and started learning more about Filipino culture, even becoming an executive officer. But he said the organization was mainly attended by non-Filipino Asian Americans and lacked the essence of what it means to be Filipino.

"It's not like being Korean where they have K-pop and [all] that goes with that," Averion said. "We have GMA Pinoy TV, which is like the trashiest soap opera you can find. And that's kind of what we're known for besides that and singing and weird food. So not a lot of people were really invested in being a part of that culture."

Averion would find new perspective and direction through an unlikely source: a UTD marketing alum he was interviewing for a Mercury article. Fellow Filipino Mark Sampelo had made waves by co-founding the Lone Star Palengke, a festival celebrating Filipino culture that drew over 10,000 attendees in its inaugural year, 2022, and was working on founding a Filipinotown and resurrecting the inactive Filipino community center in South Dallas.

> "Knowing there's at least 100,000 of us here with no stories being told, I decided it's time that we start giving our reason for our voices to be heard."
>
> **— André Averion**

"I was still very much in the mindset of like, who am I? What am I doing here? I'm having my midlife crisis going through college," Averion said. "And then I meet Mark, we have that conversation. It was supposed to be a 15 minute interview, [but] I took up [the] office time for two hours, we talked and talked about our experience."

Sampelo told Averion that there were 80,000 Filipinos in North Texas as of 2020 — a number that PACE estimates has reached 100,000 as of 2024 — which Averion said he found hard to believe because of a lack of interaction between different Filipino families, businesses and groups.

"We didn't know each other, we didn't know where we were, what was going on," Averion said.

Averion started volunteering with PACE shortly after graduating in spring 2024 and quickly became head of a brand-new department: communications. His responsibilities include all the journalism for *Bayanihan Press*, managing PACE's website and working with its marketing team to network within the community, as well as promote events and the publication itself. Averion said he noticed how Filipino events and businesses are occasionally captured by local news outlets, but never consistently platformed — the driving force for him to found the publication.

"Knowing there's at least 100,000 of us here with no stories being told, I decided it's time that we start giving our reason for our voices to be heard, starting to centralize information so we can start talking to each other and kind of gain interest back in," Averion said. "Even if people weren't interested in being Filipino back in the Philippines, they could be interested in the community and a culture that's growing here."

Averion currently holds the record for most Mercury articles written by one person with over 100 bylines to his name. He said that dogged focus on work continued when he joined PACE, allowing him to excel in nearly singlehandedly running a publication.

"It's a community that needs this kind of work," Averion said. "Even if I'm the only person doing it, I know I won't be [alone] for the long run, other people will take my place eventually … But at the very least, um, when there's nothing at all, someone has to start it … And that's more important to me than the struggles that come with starting this from the ground up. The mission, the vision and what this means for future generations, for families growing here, for businesses just starting up here after Covid, that means a lot."

Oftentimes, Averion would find himself the youngest person in the room; Filipino town hall meetings and cultural events alike were primarily attended by seasoned professionals or older adults, and practically no college students showed up. One of Averion's hopes is to connect younger generations with the local Filipino community and identity.

"It's taking those steps so people don't have to be like me where they don't know their identity, that their parents are scared of them knowing their identity until they come find it for themselves and then get lost in the whole mess of what the hell is being Filipino," Averion said. "People at UTD, whether you're Filipino or just Asian American or just want to get more involved in that community, that culture, there's opportunities to do so. There's things after college, there's a community here that ultimately, as big as it is, does still need help."

HRIDYA DHULIPALA | RETROGRADE STAFF

After promoting the Lone Star Palengke in late 2024, *Bayanihan Press* has shifted toward political coverage following the 2024 general elections, honing in on what Filipinos in Dallas most need to know, while continuing to discuss events, businesses and notable people from the community. Readers can find the publication's articles on PACE's website and keep up with new releases through its Instagram, @bayanihanpress.

The name "Bayanihan Press" refers to the Filipino concept of bayanihan, where members of a community work together and assist each other to accomplish a difficult task, and that a foundational principle of the publication is kapwa, or a unifying identity shared by multiple people, according to Averion.

"The generation that's in DFW, most of them I've met talked to miss the idea of being Filipino," Averion said. "What's the point of being Filipino when there's no community to support you? There's no resources directed towards you, there's no one to talk about you if you're Filipino … That's what I'm hoping to change is being Filipino is okay. There are resources for being Filipino. We're gonna have a community of being Filipino. There's already a community, maybe not a center, but that will hopefully change within the next few years."

DEBORAH LUO | RETROGRADE STAFF

# The Thomsen Fund has a major PR problem; nobody knows it exists

UTD's program that does the most to make the fine arts accessible seems impossible to find unless you already know where to look

**ASHNA KARIA**
Staff Writer

A few months ago, I was standing in line to pick up some free opera tickets, generously provided by the Thomsen Fund, and I realized I was seeing a lot of the same people as the month before ... and the month before that as well. The Thomsen Fund provides UTD students with free tickets to fine arts events including symphony, opera, ballet and theater productions, handing out an estimated 3,000 tickets a year, and it is undeniably the best thing UTD does to demonstrate that the world of fine art and culture is truly for everyone. Despite the administrators of the fund trying to make accessibility a priority, information about the program isn't as publicized as it should be.

Currently, the Thomsen Fund's main page is hosted on the honors college website, the honors college Instagram is the main social media vehicle for upcoming ticket distributions. To receive notifications about what tickets are available and when, you have to join a Microsoft Teams channel accessible through a link on the Thomsen Fund page. Given this choice of locale, it's not that surprising that people outside the honors college aren't aware of the program or don't realize that all UTD students are eligible to claim tickets.

As an informal experiment, I wanted to see if I could get to the Thomsen Fund page from the UTD homepage without searching for the name of the program, or going directly to the honors college page where I knew it would be. These guidelines were meant to represent the amount of information a student might have if they were looking for student programs or opportunities for exploring the city of Dallas.

I started at the homepage, naively unaware of the odyssey I was embarking on. From there, I went to the header "Campus Life" and clicked on "Culture," listed under related pages. After skimming through a couple lines about engineers in the anime orchestra and nerds who play sports, I took myself back to "Campus Life" and tried again, going to "Student Services" this time — another dead end. At this point, I decided to try a different tactic and went from "Campus Life" to the Comet Calendar. From there, I clicked on a scheduled visit to the Perot Museum and went to a tag titled "Arts and Culture." This was another dead end on the ticket front, but I still had faith.

I returned to the UTD website and hovered over the "Info For" button at the very top to get to "Student Information." This led to a lot of the same links. This time I knew to skip over the red herring of "Campus Life" and tried the organization page, but that led nowhere. I tried the "Info For" tab again, this time going to "DFW Community." I tried "Fine Arts Events," which took me to the same listings as the "Arts and Culture" tag on the Comet Calendar. There were some neat events sponsored by the Bass School of Arts and Humanities, but no free tickets in sight. Out of the two off-campus events listed on this page, one was a program by the Dallas Symphony Orchestra, but the listing only contained a link to purchase tickets, mentioning nothing about the Thomsen Fund.

> "The fund program is a credit to UTD, providing students with an opportunity they could scarcely hope to find elsewhere and giving us a chance to better appreciate the bustling city and thriving artistic culture we're so close to."

At this point I was starting to give up my search. Finally, I bent one of my rules and searched the word "tickets." The Thomsen Fund page was the sixth result, right below a heading about discounted tickets. Searching "symphony" and "opera" got even better results, putting the Thomsen Fund page at second and fourth respectively. In contrast, when I started at the honors college page, I simply hovered over the "Opportunities" tab and there it was, one click away.

When I started this experiment, I didn't realize how confusing, time-consuming, and frustrating the search would be. I went to multiple pages, backtracking more often than I went forward, and by the end of it all, I had a headache to match my screen time.

The information has to live somewhere, but I fail to see why that place has to be the honors college alone — somewhere non-honors students have little incentive to visit out of their own volition. The honors college site hosts the Thomsen Fund page, an honors program specialist runs ticket distribution, and the honors college Instagram page posts about upcoming distribution dates. None of this is a problem in itself, but it is counterintuitive that the honors college is the only official source of information about a program meant for all UTD students. It sends a misleading message about the program and the base it serves.

Right now, a student has to already be interacting with honors college material to find the Thomsen Fund page or must hear about the program elsewhere to even know what they should search for. I highly doubt that was the initial intention of the program, nor do I believe it is a purposeful attempt to exclude non-honors students, but the fact remains that a certain subset of students has a much easier time accessing this opportunity than the rest. It's a frustrating issue with a very simple solution — just put program information out there more consistently and more broadly. The last time ticket distribution showed up as an event on the Comet Calendar was December 2022, and it was the only date posted for the whole year.

Similar trends can be found on social media. When looking through the Thomsen Fund Instagram hashtag, it shows that the only large account that posts about the fund is the honors college, serving 1,843 followers. Comparing that to the Student Government account with 3,170 followers, it appears there are more than a couple students left out of the loop. There's a simple solution to this as well — if the honors college posts about ticket distribution on Instagram, maybe the Student Government page can repost it, or even better, the Bass School can incorporate distribution dates into their event listings and Instagram feed. Furthermore, these listings and posts should be permanent, not Instagram stories that disappear in a day because, believe it or not, "blink and you'll miss it" marketing isn't the best way to inform a broad student base about programs that last longer than a day.

Perhaps the people who read this article or the Thomsen Fund article published in *The Mercury* last year will be equipped to take advantage of this opportunity, but what about next year? And the year after that? Messaging about ongoing opportunities should be pushed consistently to reach the broadest possible audience and demonstrate the fund's commitment to accessibility.

The fund program is a credit to UTD, providing students with an opportunity they could scarcely hope to find elsewhere and giving us a chance to better appreciate the bustling city and thriving artistic culture we're so close to. It can and should be one of our shining stars, recognized as one of the best ways UTD gives back to its students. This is a world of culture right at your fingertips, if only the information about it was a little bit closer to the homepage.

Even if the official marketing doesn't change, student-led information networks are better than nothing. I strongly encourage returning students to take up the mantle of spreading the word and take advantage of this program when ticket distribution resumes in September. For notifications about what tickets are available and when, make sure to visit the Thomsen Fund page and opt into the Thomsen Fund Tickets channel on Teams.

# We only see ourselves onscreen when the TV is off

The popular TV series "Ted Lasso" sparked controversy over its fourth season, proving minority stories still struggle for respesct

YIYI DING | RETROGRADE STAFF

**VARUN SARAVANAN**
Staff Writer

After Apple TV's show "Ted Lasso" was renewed for a fourth season, some viewers were angered by the switch toward a female cast — an increasingly common trend for film and television. But this outrage against diverse casting is baseless if an entertaining production is all you ask for.

"Ted Lasso" was wildly successful, in part for its release during the pandemic era and its wholesome underdog spirit. The show's third, then-final, season brought the story of an American coach and his British soccer team to a satisfying conclusion. With viewers yearning for more and speculation for months, Apple finally announced the production of a fourth season featuring crowd-favorite Jason Sudeikis reprising his role as Ted Lasso, but with a small twist — Ted is coaching a women's team.

While this season was meant as a spinoff for fans begging for more, some were quick to anger, not from the loss of a familiar men's team, but the addition of the female cast. Introducing gender-swapped roles and people of color into shows has become increasingly politicized since the rise of anti-DEI factions mocking diversity as "wokeness" in the 2010s. Trump's ascendance to the spotlight and the proliferation of McCarthyism-like "anti-woke" rhetoric of Ron Desantis and Tucker Carlson has targeted topics from covering segregation in schools to M&M's mascots for spreading a hateful and "un-American" ideology.

The 2016 "Ghostbusters" movie faced a similar backlash to "Ted Lasso," despite its star-studded, comedically excellent cast. Racist hate speech from Milo Yiannopoulos, a conservative media editor, compared Leslie Jones to a gorilla and degraded her role in the 1980 "Ghostbuster" remake. "Percy Jackson," a live action children's show based on Rick Riordan's novels, and the upcoming "How to Train Your Dragon" film angered some when they switched blonde characters of European descent to people of color. The backlash was enough to elicit public responses from Riordan and the movie director to protect the cast from hate. And at an extreme, "The Little Mermaid" received backlash from middle-aged conservatives for propagating "scientific disinformation" after an African American actress played Ariel, arguing that a cartoon, mythical half-fish could not have enough melanin to be any race but white.

A key argument is that these are unnecessary changes that promote minority groups at the expense of a majority. But this easily overlooks the past underrepresentation of these groups in cinema. For decades, people of color and non-male roles were disproportionately undercast and shown in a negative light. 51.4% of top movies with female leads, according to UCLA's 2025 Hollywood Diversity Report, are from films with budgets under 30 million USD, which is designated low budget relative to $100 million blockbusters. Phases like the Blaxploitation era, which exemplified a violent genre of African American villains driven by anti-white retribution, degraded the image of people of color. The same diversity report shows that 25.2% of leads in top films were cast as minorities, compared to 10.5% in 2011. Hollywood's attempts to remediate its controversial and discriminatory past have been effective, but the disparity still exists — 44% of the current U.S. population is non-white.

With more immigrant families in the U.S., movies are starting to better reflect their audience, which is especially true for children looking for relatable role-models on screen.

A key argument against supporting these race and gender swaps is that the change in identity does little to promote visibility of the minority group's lived experience. While this is true, it also concedes that these minor changes can exist without disrupting the plot, giving value to minority representation without upsetting a familiar audience. This argument is used haphazardly to undermine character renewals by those who seek to poke holes and find gripes with these issues. But it does stand as a valuable argument to promote better, more faithful representation of minorities in cinema. Creating brand-new stories to accurately portray a group can tackle the issues of underrepresentation and stigma at once — which "Ted Lasso" aims to do. Spinoffs, like the upcoming fourth season, build on the advantage of familiar characters and themes to deliver a new, authentic story representative of a new, multicultural cast. The upcoming fourth season attempts to bring honest stories from marginalized backgrounds to a mainstream, and increasingly diverse, audience.

With a biased mindset from the start, reviews from an adult audience are doomed to begin with, which propagates the idea that the diversity these shows promote is what ruins the experience for viewers. But if a change in superficial traits truly takes from the content's ability to entertain someone, then the content might not be the issue. The issue boils down to whether a new identity changes a character beyond recognition and deviates from the original plot to ruin a remake, or whether the viewer does not want to accept the truth that someone of a minority identity is capable of meeting or exceeding the original, non-minority character's personality.

The markings of a post-discrimination society are not present in America. And while many events on the news are outbursts of radical activity, its these day-to-day microaggressions and stigmatisms that normalize the idea that minorities cannot live up to the legacy of America's privileged classes. When these recasts and spinoffs are announced, take a moment to understand the motivations behind the decision, the changes they bring to the plot, and the impact they can have on the targeted audience. Instead of jumping to stereotypical conclusions and outrage, leave the cycle of hate and give "Ted Lasso" a chance to redefine the narrative of remakes.

# Editor's Desk: The blatant double standard of policy violations

**GREGORIO OLIVARES GUTIERREZ**
Editor-in-Chief

On March 31, UTD's chapter of Turning Point USA and far-right internet personality Alex Stein stopped by a Trans Day of Visibility demonstration and harassed, intimidated and threatened both UTD students and campus administrators.

Stein went so far as to call the second-highest ranking university official, vice president and chief of staff Rafael Martín, an illegal immigrant and threatened to call ICE on him. Additionally, *The Retrograde* reported that homophobic and ableist slurs were used against students. University administrators have not indicated that they are doing anything about this even after *The Retrograde* reached out and asked.

Extreme violence was used against UTD's Students for Justice in Palestine when they formed an encampment on May 1 to protest the university's support of what the United Nations has called "the crime against humanity of extermination with relentless and deliberate attacks on medical personnel and facilities." The justification for this response was that SJP had violated university policy. It seems like Stein and TPUSA not receiving any pressure from the university, while SJP did, suggests that UTD is only interested in pursuing policy violations if it's a predominantly Muslim student organization that is taking action

There is no shortage of evidence that Stein and TPUSA violated university policy.

Following students around campus, yelling slurs, making threats of violence and engaging in Islamophobic and antisemitic activity all violate key provisions found within the student code of conduct and the speech expression and assembly policy. In total that would amount to violations of UTDSP5001: Section B, Subsection 7: Harassment; UTDSP5001: Section C, Subsection 10: Disruption; UTDSP5001: Section C, Subsection 12: Coercing Attention; UTDSP5001: Section J, Subsection 42: Location and Form of Presentation; UTDSP5003: Section C, Subsection 9, Item 6: Conduct dangerous to others; UTDSP5003: Section C, Subsection 9, Item 18: Disruptive conduct; and UTDBP3090: Nondiscrimination.

Students interviewed after the protest alleged the cameramen with Stein and TPUSA displayed the outline of concealed-carry weapons while threatening students. Such behavior, if found true after an investigation, would be a violation of UTDSP5001: Section B, Subsection 9: Prohibited Items or Action; UTDSP5003: Section C, Subsection 9, Item 5: Firearms, dangerous weapons, explosives, and hazardous materials; and UTDPP1103: Section 3.1: Concealment.

Guest speakers for an official student organization like TPUSA are regulated by university policy and given the spontaneous and impromptu nature of the disruption, TPUSA would have violated guest speaker regulations if it did not notify the university in advance. See UTDSP5001: Section J, Subsection 41: Guest Speakers and UTDSP5001: Section K, Subsection 47: Applications.

A video posted by a TPUSA member shows Martín explicitly instructing a student member of TPUSA to maintain a distance between the counter protesters and the demonstrators, a directive which was repeatedly ignored as the disruption continued. UTD requires its students follow the rules, especially when the vice president of the school asks them to do so. Not doing so constitutes a violation of UTDSP5003: Section C, Subsection 9, Item 15: Violation of General Rules and Regulations and UTDSP5003: Section C, Subsection 9, Item 19: Failure to comply with the instructions of a University official.

And on the off-chance that TPUSA manages to convince campus administration that no students were involved in saying slurs, harassment or threatening others during the disruption, the simple act of helping Stein come to campus and do all of these things is in itself a violation of UTDSP5003: Section C, Subsection 9, Item 22: Attempts, Aiding, or Abetting the Commission of an Offense.

In total, that is about fifteen different violations in just one day. If university policy clearly shows that such behavior shouldn't be allowed on campus, why did UTDPD do nothing? Why didn't the administrators watching the disruption do more to protect their students? UTD needs to take action immediately and enforce its own policy, because the current message this behavior sends is that neo-Nazis are welcome to come harass and threaten our incredibly diverse student body.

RAINIER PEDERSON | RETROGRADE STAFF

Stein threatened to call ICE on a university administrator and nothing was done, so if Stein ever gets invited back to campus by TPUSA, nothing would stop him from threatening our large population of international students with the same threat — or making good on it with an actual phone call. The current federal government has already shown it has a penchant for deporting international students without on a whim, and UTD has shown it won't step in to protect its own students even if it is within its full authority to do so. UTD leadership is setting an unacceptable double standard by violently punishing students that oppose genocide while letting off-campus instigators verbally attack and threaten students, who are already at elevated risk of violence for being minorities or immigrants, with complete impunity. And then they have the gall to ask for donations for Comets Giving Day as if any of this behavior merits a reward.

# Paxton's probe into Dallas police's policies will make the city less safe

## Local law enforcement trying to balance protecting immigrant communities with adhering to state mandates is creating a sticky situation

**SAMHITHA PALLA**
Staff Writer

On March 13, Texas Attorney General Ken Paxton launched an investigation into the Dallas Police Department for their refusal to adhere to state and federal immigration laws. The city of Dallas' policies limits local cooperation with federal immigration officers and their policies and aims to create safer communities in which undocumented immigrants have the freedom to report crimes without the fear of deportation. The DPD argues that by not serving as extensions of immigration enforcement, it can maintain a sense of trust and cooperation with immigrant communities, thus leading to improved public safety. This probe is confusing residents and will ultimately make Dallas less safe.

Initial criticism of DPD's alleged sanctuary policies, culminating in the Paxton investigation, first stemmed from comments made by Interim Police Chief Michael Igo during a community meeting in February. Igo maintained his stance that DPD will not work with federal agencies to detain people because of their immigration status. In response to the criticism, primarily by conservative figures such as Texas Lieutenant Governor Dan Patrick, Igo clarified in a later meeting that while DPD will continue to work with state and local governments, the department was not asked by higher up authorities to participate in immigration detainment efforts and will continue to monitor within legal requirements. Igo's stance signals an earnest attempt to foster harmony and trust between law enforcement and immigrant communities. However, the political tug of war between local law enforcement and state or federal government only confuses immigrants about whether they can trust law enforcement and if they can help maintain safety without facing the risk of deportation. In the end, this matter is becoming a gray area in which residents aren't sure of who to trust in their time of need. This mistrust will lead to fewer people reporting crimes, thus worsening public safety. In the end, it's the residents who suffer from the ramifications of the law.

GRACE COWGER | RETROGRADE STAFF

Paxton's probe intends to find evidence of Dallas' policies violating Texas law, which bans local entities from implementing sanctuary city policies that limit immigration enforcement. State officials argue that enforcing immigration laws are essential to keeping the city safe, contrary to DPD's stance that building trust around reporting crimes is what will keep the people safe — and the state officials are wrong.

Without these polices, local law enforcement is required to arrest an individual if they suspect them of being undocumented, which will cause the residents will lose their trust in the law enforcement and stop reporting crimes. As a Texas resident, I would not want to approach law enforcement if the very same people attempted to hurt me because of my immigration status. For example, if an individual, who is coincidentally undocumented, witnesses a brutal armed robbery at a convenience store, the individual might hesitate to report the crime out of fear of being suspected as undocumented, thereby jeopardizing his and his family's safety. With protections in place, the individual can approach law enforcement and provide a testimony that can lead to the arrest and conviction of the perpetrators. These polices allow residents to cooperate with law enforcement without fearing deportation, leading to safer communities.

While DPD's refusal to comply with Paxton's orders does show that the law enforcement is trying to help and protect immigrants to the best of their ability, one can never be too careful in this current political turmoil, especially when a chunk of UTD students live in Dallas and are directly affected by changes in these policies. Dallas residents are encouraged to follow the advice and standard protocol of maintaining their right to remain silent or contacting a designated lawyer if they ever get arrested for their immigration status.

DPD's stance on prioritizing public safety in the face of pressure shows initiative that law enforcement will protect Dallas residents regardless of their immigration status. But if the investigations find fault with DPD's policies —which is likely —then that protection will erode as DPD is forced to begin arresting suspected undocumented immigrants. The Dallas community cherishes DPD looking out for its residents, but when local police ultimately defer to an immigration-hostile state and federal government, the safety they foster is minimal, if nonexistent.

# Letters to the Editor submitted for April

## Regarding SB 819

The state of Texas has made a lot of progress toward clean energy through the expansion of the wind turbine and solar panel industries. Over $7 billion has been invested in grid expansion and Competitive Renewable Energy Zone transmission lines, connecting clean energy plants to industrial buildings. This industry has also created thousands of jobs.

However, SB 819 threatens these advancements by imposing excessive financial and administrative hurdles on renewable energy while banning tax incentives and discouraging investment. These restrictions unfairly burden the crucial industries driving our state's economic growth, slowing the clean energy transition and ultimately leaving Texas behind other states.

Furthermore, restricting renewable energy keeps us reliant on fossil fuels, worsening air pollution and accelerating climate change. At a time when we should be encouraging clean energy innovation, this bill does exactly the opposite by pushing us further back in time.

I urge lawmakers to reject SB 819 and stand up for a future that prioritizes lower energy costs, a better job outlook and improving population health.

– Sana Afsheen, neroscience sophomore

## TPUSA is a danger to students and campus administration must hold them accountable

On March 31, a group of Turning Point USA-affiliated students and outside agitators violently disrupted a Trans Day of Visibility demonstration, the latest incident in a clear pattern of behavior on the part of TPUSA.

As an alum and former Student Government Chair of Diversity, Equity and Belonging, I am so disappointed by the way that TPUSA has been allowed to act with impunity. In October 2022, when TPUSA members harassed and threatened students at an event, I and many other students rang the alarm bells on the danger that TPUSA poses to students. We compiled evidence of disruptive conduct and harassment by TPUSA members and presented this evidence to the Student Organization Center and the Office of the Dean of Students, but this appears to have not been enough to warrant any reprimand on TPUSA as an organization.

The fact that this has been happening and continues to happen, even with new leadership, shows that TPUSA as an organization simply cannot stop themselves from threatening students, and as such, they must face official consequences. Per the Student Code of Conduct, "student organizations are accountable for the conduct and actions of their members." As such, when UTD TPUSA officers arrived with far-right provocateur Alex Stein and his crew, responsibility for the ensuing events falls squarely on TPUSA.

> "As an alum and former Student Government Chair of Diversity, Equity and Belonging, I am so disappointed by the way that TPUSA has been allowed to act with impunity."

Alex Stein's camera crew explicitly threatened students participating in the demonstration, taunting them with slurs like "tranny," "retard" and "faggot," while flashing concealed firearms and threatening to punch students, seemingly to provoke a reaction.

Under administration's watch, I saw UTD fall from one of the best campuses in the country for queer and trans students to one that allows open attacks against trans students to be perpetrated by registered student organizations with complete impunity. To begin to rectify this, TPUSA must be officially sanctioned, its officers must face disciplinary action, and Alex Stein and all persons affiliated with him who were present on March 31 must be barred from entering campus.

TPUSA must be officially dissolved as an organization at UTD. I know they have good lawyers, but I'm sure they can at least be barred from using campus facilities — including setting up booths on campus. Moreover, Paige Neumann and other TPUSA members should face official disciplinary proceedings for their roles in the attack against UTD students.

In addition to barring Alex Stein and his crew from campus, an investigation should be conducted by UTDPD on who exactly the individual was who appeared to call Stein 15 minutes before his arrival, and what business this individual had on campus. Alex Stein, his crew and any individual affiliated with him who was present at the demonstration should be criminally charged with harassment, disorderly conduct and any other relevant charges, especially related to the alleged brandishing of a firearm.

– River B., Political Science B.A. '22

Editorial

# DON'T CROSS THE PICKET LINE

## Student Affairs is attempting to fill *The Mercury* with scabs to circumvent acknowledging former staff's strike demands

*Editor's note: Originally published on web March 10, 2025. The Retrograde has chosen to reprint this article without substantial edits for historicity.*

On March 10, Student Affairs administration began rolling out its plan to hire new students to fill leadership roles at *The Mercury.* We, the management and staff at *The Retrograde,* unequivocally denounce this.

For the past ten months, student media leadership, under the direction of Vice President Gene Fitch and Senior Director of Marketing Jenni Huffenberger, has done nothing but attack free press on campus.

When UTD violently cracked down on last year's encampment organized by pro-Palestine student protesters, *The Mercury* provided live breaking news coverage of this historic moment in UTD history — which culminated in the May 20 special issue of *The Mercury.* In response to this coverage, Student Affairs demoted *The Mercury's* then-adviser Jonathan Stewart and appointed Huffenberger, his boss, as interim director and adviser of Student Media in his place. In her first meeting with the Mercury management team, Huffenberger called the May 20 issue "journalistic malpractice" without concretely explaining why, insisting it portrayed UTD in a negative light. That very issue has been critiqued by local journalists, student media mentors and lawyers and found not to be "journalistic malpractice" at all.

> "Student Affairs did not address or resolve any of the issues that caused *The Mercury's* former staff to strike in protest."

When *The Mercury's* editorial board refused to submit to prior review, the new Director of Student Media Lydia Lum threatened to prevent staff from traveling to educational conferences. In mid-September, Lum initiated the process to remove Gregorio Olivares Gutierrez as editor-in-chief on charges *The Mercury's* entire management team found unreasonable, resulting in the newspaper going on strike. Later, when Lum had a change of heart and attempted to advocate for the students at *The Mercury,* Student Affairs fired her.

When the Academic Senate and Student Government attempted to mediate upon hearing news of Mercury's strike, Fitch told them to not interfere in his process since the student media bylaws did not grant the senate or SG authority over student media. Student Affairs would go on to flout or circumvent these very bylaws numerous times — for instance, by denying Olivares a proper appeal procedure for his termination.

In October, Student Affairs fired every single member of *The Mercury's* management team after sending an official email saying their employment would be reviewed by the Student Media Operating Board. Such a review never came. Instead, university administrators chose to unilaterally fire the striking student journalists without due process, calling them voluntary resignations.

When free speech organizations like the Foundation of Individual Rights and Expression and the Student Press Law Center sent letters to UTD advising leadership to change course and actually support student journalists, the university refused to respond.

*The Mercury* was placed on hiatus by Student Government, Academic Senate and Vice President Rafael Martín so a committee could revise the bylaws governing student media. These bylaws, vague and easily abused against student journalists, were weaponized to oust Olivares from his editor-in-chief position and remain the center of former Mercury staff's strike demands. But these bylaws were not changed in any way before Martin declared the committee adjourned and *The Mercury* ready to revive.

What the committee did achieve was creating the Committee on Student Media, which is tasked with revising the student media bylaws that have ineffectively governed student media since 2017. But the COSM first needs to be approved by the Academic Senate, Student Government and Staff Council before it can start existing and revising the bylaws. Student Affairs trying to revive *The Mercury* in the middle of this legal process is a direct violation of the hiatus *The Mercury* is under, as well as the principles of shared governance and student First Amendment rights. Once again, Student Affairs is choosing to ignore university policy and procedures in favor of doing whatever it pleases with *The Mercury.* Last time administrators did this, they destroyed *The Mercury*. We wonder what new lows they may reach as they work to create their own anti-student paper.

To put it simply: Student Affairs did not address or resolve any of the issues that caused **The Mercury's** former staff to strike in protest. Without making any meaningful changes, administrators are attempting to resurrect *The Mercury* as if those exact same problems will not return to haunt its new editors. Administrators calling what independent journalists and student media mentors deemed excellent breaking news coverage "journalistic malpractice" because it doesn't align with UTD's image doesn't just disappear overnight. Arbitrary punishments and the random removal of advisers and editors won't suddenly stop now that ten months of complete administrative inaction have passed. Student Affairs is creating a new Mercury with a docile leadership team that will be too afraid to publish any story that might offend administration's sensibilities after seeing what they did to itsthe previous leaders for daring to be critical.

*The Retrograde* has always been vocally open to negotiating with administration. We would like to continue working with UTD similar to how *The Mercury* did so we can pay stipends and contributor fees to our members, use campus resources and more. The second UTD administration invites us to the negotiation table, *The Retrograde* will be there, ready to work on a compromise. But despite repeatedly extending invitations for reconciliation to UTD administration, we have received nothing but cold silence or dismissal. It is clear Student Affairs does not care to solve the problems that led to *The Mercury* shutting down, but merely restart it as quickly as possible to save face for the university.

*The Retrograde* is filled with former Mercury staff and management who left *The Mercury* because of their refusal to work at a censored and caged publication. Since its creation, *The Retrograde* has provided UTD's community with news, culture and opinion articles. We will continue to publish online per our biweekly schedule, as well as publish print issues once per month. We have no intention to stop our coverage — which includes critical investigative topics like the aftermath of the May 1 arrests; research funding on campus; UTD's search for a new president; internal scandals and more — just because Student Affairs seeks to puppet the corpse of *The Mercury* in a macabre display.

> "The second UTD admin invites us to the negotiation table, *The Retrograde* will be there, ready to work on a compromise."

According to flyers distributed by Student Affairs, applications for *The Mercury's* leadership positions are open until March 31. We urge all students on campus who care about free press, critical and meaningful student journalism and the fight against administrative overreach not to apply for either of these positions, and to continue calling on UTD to negotiate with *The Retrograde* as UTD's current student-run newspaper.

Any visitors to *The Mercury's* website will be greeted by a large banner that reads "MERCURY ON STRIKE," and a breakdown of the three simple strike demands student journalists started out with: 1) the reinstatement of Gregorio Olivares Gutierrez as editor-in-chief; 2) improved bylaws for managing disputes between students and administrators; 3) democratically elected newspaper leadership rather than appointment by administration. Our demands today are different. This entire public spectacle could have been avoided if Student Affairs leadership chose to talk with students instead of violating its own procedures to punish them more.

This isn't simply an issue of policy misinterpretation and an erroneous firing, but an issue of students' free speech and the protections surrounding it. Student Affairs does nothing to protect student journalists, and students will remain in danger unless there is a fundamental shift in how student media is organized. A shift wherein the students themselves work with industry professionals to develop their own operating rules and procedures and can engage in investigative journalism without fear of administrative pushback is the only way student journalism can succeed on any university campus.

Student Affairs must recognize *The Retrograde* as the independent student newspaper on campus, since mere editorial independence only goes so far when UTD is empowered to mass fire editors on a whim. Student Affairs must allow COSM to amend the student media bylaws before it begins attempting to lure more students into its stranglehold at *The Mercury.* Student Affairs must take *The Retrograde's* strike demands seriously and engage with our publication as a campus entity with far-reaching public support, the recognition of Student Government, a dedicated readership and cumulative decades of experience writing stories and managing a newspaper.

If Student Affairs wishes to pretend nothing ever happened and they can effortlessly revive the publication they murdered, then we will ensure that our experience, expertise and industry connections never make it to *The Mercury.* We would love to see them find a new batch of student journalists at a school that has no journalism program, or find them industry mentors when the entire student journalism world and DFW journalistic community is on *The Retrograde's* side. If UTD administration is uninterested in negotiating, *The Retrograde* is set up to continue functioning independently without any university support. We thank our dedicated readers, donors and supporters for making this possible.

Support the continued student journalist strike against Student Affairs by adding your name to our statement on the web version of this article at retrogradenews.com, or by donating to our GoFundMe or Patreon. To voice your displeasure at administration's Mercury revival attempt, email gene.fitch@utdallas.edu and jennib@utdallas.edu with the template provided here or call 972-883-6236 (Fitch) and 972-883-2244 (Huffenberger).

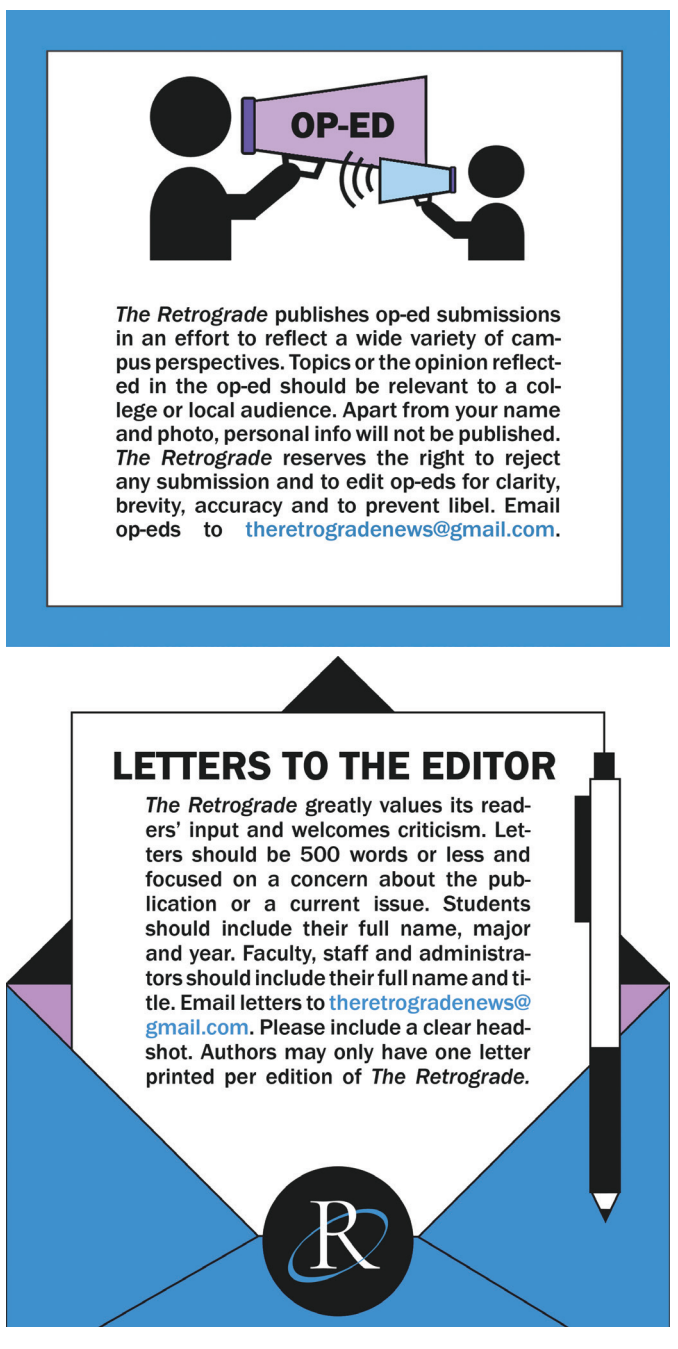
**GREGORIO OLIVARES GUTIERREZ**
Editor-in-Chief

**MARIA SHAIKH**
Managing Editor

**AIMEE MORGAN**
News Editor

**NANDINI SINGH**
Life & Arts Editor

WE'RE HIRING!
• Reporters
• Photographers
• Graphic Artists
• Layout Artists
Visit tinyurl.com/applyRG to hone your skills, expand your network and learn about the inner workings of UTD's campus.


OP-ED
The Retrograde publishes op-ed submissions in an effort to reflect a wide variety of campus perspectives. Topics or the opinion reflected in the op-ed should be relevant to a college or local audience. Apart from your name and photo, personal info will not be published. The Retrograde reserves the right to reject any submission and to edit op-eds for clarity, brevity, accuracy and to prevent libel. Email op-eds to theretrogradenews@gmail.com.
LETTERS TO THE EDITOR
The Retrograde greatly values its readers' input and welcomes criticism. Letters should be 500 words or less and focused on a concern about the publication or a current issue. Students should include their full name, major and year. Faculty, staff and administrators should include their full name and title. Email letters to theretrogradenews@gmail.com. Please include a clear headshot. Authors may only have one letter printed per edition of The Retrograde.